

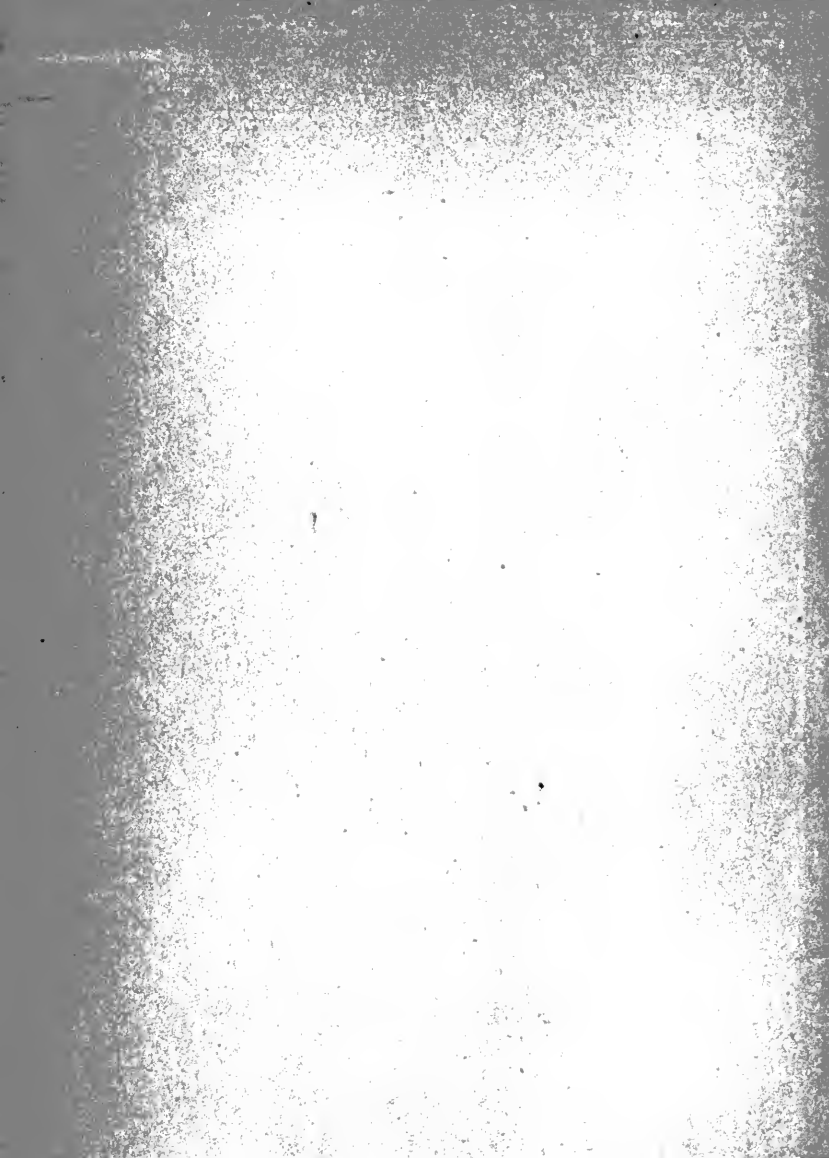
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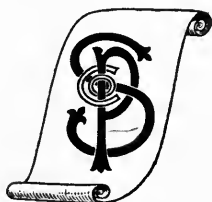
F. Laurence Roney Weir





Britomart, the Socialist

BY
FLORENCE RONEY WEIR



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BRITOMART, THE SOCIALIST.

CHAPTER I.

A little brown house from whose chimney no smoke had issued for three years, the door standing part way open, disclosing a musty interior, and a big packing case in the middle of the kitchen floor; a dusty lilac bush with a robin's nest in its top, all about waving grain just beginning to ripen to its harvest. A tall girl in a brown, calico gown, with a man's hat pinned picturesquely askew on her head, her hands rolled in her apron to protect them from the sun, standing peering in at the open door of the house; and all about the melting July heat, the smell of cut hay, wild roses and strawberries.

The girl was Britomart Landor, and she had no business whatever to be peering there, because down in the meadow, whence came that odor of hay, her father and brother, William John, were longing with the hunger and thirst born of habit, for the sandwiches and coffee hidden in the pail which she carried on her arm. She might have gone through the woods and over the brook, and so reached the hay-field by a shorter way, but instead she had come by the

way of the road in order to stop at the old house for a minute, where she had discovered the open door and the packing box.

The house belonged to Mr. Leven, who lived on the farm next to the Landors'; it had not been open for a long time. Britomart often pressed her face against the panes, and, gazing into the two bare rooms, saw the sunlight lying in squares on the floor, and imagined life and laughter within. Many a time she wished she might rent or buy the place of old Mr. Leven, and furnish it just enough to be livable.

"I would paint the floors, and put big, braided rugs in the centers of them. In the farther room I would have a little white bed, a small mirror like mine at home, and a big wooden rocker; and right in the corner of the kitchen the cunningest cupboard, with a pale yellow curtain in front. There should be deep blue dishes and a brown earthen teapot. I should have blinds and sash-curtains at the windows, and my old piano should stand in the corner there. All the forenoon I would sit by the window with some lovely book and read a little, and dream a little, and look into the wheat, and there would not be a sound, except the creaking of the lilac bush against the house, the sighing of the wind, and, now and then, the robin. After tea I would sit on the door step and dream in the summer twilight; and if a storm came up, I would go inside, draw down the blinds and play grand music. My hands would fairly fly while the

tempest beat on my little house and the wind tore at the lilac bush."

This was only one of the many fancies Britomart wove about the little house, and when she discovered that some one was to take possession, she felt that the unknown was intruding on her private domain. She stepped a little nearer the door, her tin pail swinging securely on her arm. She longed to go in and explore a little. Years after, when the hurry and tumult of a larger life wearied this woman, a vision of this house, adrift in the wheat fields, would come to her with a soothing sense of perfect stillness.

She made a pretty picture as she bent slightly forward to look in at the open door. She was taller than most women. The abundant hair, coiled under the broken straw hat, was of coarse, springy texture, and so dark as to pass for black with strangers. Her eyes were strong, dark blue, under well arched brows; her complexion superb, although exposed to all kinds of weather. Despite these good points, Britomart Landor was considered a very plain girl in the neighborhood where she lived. She was "smart"—no one denied that. She read a great deal, could play the piano beautifully, and there was not a better cook in the vicinity of Belleville; but for beauty, she was too large, her features were not fine enough, she did not dance, and altogether, was not admired by the Belleville beaux. Tilly Leven, her neighbor, was a very pretty girl and a great catch in the neighborhood.

A step sounded behind Britomart, and she started guiltily.

"Why, Britomart! Your poor father will starve, and the coffee will be cold as a stone."

It was Mrs. Landor who administered the rebuke, with a loving smile in her eyes for this daughter who was the delight of her life. She was a large woman, and looked worried and heated with her walk. She wore a slat sun-bonnet which shut out much of the summer.

Britomart's heart was filled with contrition as she gazed at her mother's flushed face.

"I know it, mother. I am just going to run down through the wheat. What made you follow me? Did you know I was coming up by the old house and would be apt to loiter? Don't you fret about father. I guess he would come to the house before he'd starve."

They both laughed, and Mrs. Landor sat down on the door-step with a tired ejaculation. She had the usual over-worked appearance of a farmer's wife, although her hands, with their labor stains, were yet shapely, as she clasped them about her knees.

"See, mother, the door is open, and there are boxes in there. Some one is going to move in. Isn't it funny!"

"I declare that's so. Who in the world can it be? But never mind that, Britomart. You must hurry right down after pa. Mr. Spence came to the house just as you went up the hill—I saw you going the long way round with the

lunch—and he wants me to come just as soon as I can. Mary is awful sick, and they think her child will be born. I ran out and called to you, but you didn't hear, so I followed you up. I didn't want to have to go through the wheat. It's hard enough for me to travel on packed ground."

"It's terrible, isn't it!"

"Why, no, not if she comes through all right. Poor Mary! Come, come, child, hurry! Tell your father I'll be all ready when he gets to the house with the team. Mr. Spence had his sulky or I could have gone with him."

"Just like old Spence, to come with a sulky," said Britomart.

She started off swiftly through the wheat. The prickly heads swished before and behind her with an exhilarating sound. John Landor would have resented any one else running through his standing grain, but he looked up with a broad smile as this tall daughter of his appeared suddenly in the wheat like Venus in the sea.

Britomart delivered her message, and John Landor, with a look of anxiety, called to William John, who was driving the mower a short distance off; then while Britomart explained matters to William John, he hastily ate a sandwich and was ready to take the team which William John unhitched.

"I hope everything will turn out well for Frank and Mary," he called back, as the team, pulling strongly on the lines, towed him round

the base of the wheat-covered knoll out of sight.

William John sat down on a stone and proceeded to enjoy the contents of the pail at his leisure.

"Father's doughnut is here yet, and lots of coffee. Come on, sis, and eat with me."

He made room for his sister on the stone beside him. Britomart sat down and took the doughnut. She was not hungry, but she felt it would be a comfort to sit and talk things over with William John. He was a sweet-faced boy, with a long chin and a prominent nose. His frame was large and bony, indicative of strength and a coming day of fine physical proportions. When Britomart found herself in one of her restless, dissatisfied moods—and this happened often—there was nothing so soothing as a quiet talk with William John. These moods were the stirrings of a great spirit within her, but this she could not know, and her friends considered them flaws in an otherwise lovely disposition.

"William John," began Britomart, "I don't see why things are arranged as they are. When I think of it, it makes me ugly as a fiend!"

The young man was not startled by this declaration. He had heard it many times before.

"What's wrong now?" he asked, calmly munching his doughnut.

"Well, there's Mary,. She was such a nice, companionable girl before she married Frank; so progressive and ambitious. She took music lessons and sang a pretty alto, and painted some,

and—oh, I don't know—lived! And now see where she is."

"Well, she lives yet, I hope," said William John.

"Yes, but a baby! And doing her own housework in the back of a grocery store, poor as poverty, and nothing to look forward to but more poverty, and death at last, and buried in poverty!"

"Oh, Britomart, not so bad. Business may pick up and Frank's luck change. People have done well before now in grocery stores; why shouldn't Frank?"

"People have done well on farms; but you know, William John, that we are not doing well. We work our fingers to the bone, all of us, and make a bare living. Mother and father have always done so; now Frank has started in, and by and by you will marry that little fool—excuse me, William John—Tilly Leven, and you will begin the same old round."

"Yes, and you'll marry Henry Miller and be an editor's wife and pretty well off, and we'll all live near each other, and go visiting back and forth, and it won't be so bad," said William John, optimistically.

"I don't know whether I shall or not," said Britomart.

"Why, sis, what makes you talk so? You may thank your lucky stars to get a fellow like Henry Miller. He's doing well, for a young man. He is good-principled, and right here at

home. I'd a good sight rather you'd marry him and live right near us than to go off to Cranston or some other place twenty or thirty miles away. Won't you be glad to live right near the rest of us, sis?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so; but I don't want to marry at all. I hate it! When I think of living as Mary has to live—and always will have to—it makes me shudder! Just think, William John, of being shut up with Henry Miller in a ten by twelve room, listening to his talk all the time. Ugh!"

Britomart sprang up and threw the remainder of her doughnut far out into the meadow. Afterward a blackbird, with a red cap perched on the back of his head, found it there and made a feast, inviting all his friends, putting on airs because none of them had ever tasted such sweeties before.

"And the poverty—the hopelessness of the lifelong poverty," continued Britomart, "and there's no way out of it—there is no way out of it. Talk about America being the land of the free! None of us are free! We are all slaves, driven with a lash! Look at poor mother and father. Never a day to call their own; never a little foolishness." The angry tears were in her eyes, and she trod the short grass back and forth before the placid William John like a lithe young tigress.

"I can't see how we're going to help it," said William John. He could not deny the truth of

his sister's assertions, and they troubled his calm mind.

"One way we could help it would be not to bring children into the world to follow in our footsteps and tread the same weary round," declared Britomart. "Look at me. I came into the world with a longing for music—to know it, to revel in it. My mother before me had this longing, but what has been parceled out to her in this life in place of music? Why, milking cows, churning, nursing babies——"

"But you, Britomart, you know a good deal about music now."

"I know music!" cried Britomart, in fine scorn. "Because I can play the 'Battle of Prague' you think I know anything of music? Don't ever make such an assertion before one who knows, William John, because it would subject us both to ridicule."

William John was completely crushed, and brushed the crumbs off his lap in silence. He was troubled by his sister's unrest. He wished she did not take things so to heart. He had been real happy, down in the meadow among the blackbirds, and the world looked bright to him. His fancy had been dwelling on a certain face, a face which had occupied his thoughts a good deal of late; but Britomart's stormy mood had clouded his own horizon. He had not felt the world to be all wrong in the morning, but since his sister came this feeling possessed him, and it was not a pleasant feeling. He was in-

clined to be a little put out at Britomart. He loved and admired her very much, but he wished heartily that she did not get these bitter moods upon her so often. To be sure, she loved music; so did he; so did Tilly Leven. Pretty little Tilly! But Tilly did not let her love of music make her unhappy. On the contrary, she played the accordion very sweetly. One of the pictures in his mind was of her as she sat at her bedroom window, the apple blossoms thick in the orchard, a cup of spring flowers on the sill, and Tilly, in her dark calico gown and white apron, with sleeves rolled above her dimpled elbows, her light hair clinging in soft rings about her soft little face, gently pressing a spasmodic melody out of her wheezy accordion. Britomart laughed at Tilly's art and said she ought always to play martial music, because the rattling of straps and keys was so suggestive of men marching in battle array, and cavalry going at full gallop. But Britomart need not be funny at Tilly's expense; Tilly had some traits Britomart would do well to imitate—a sweet feminine content and domestic simplicity, for instance. He felt he would like to tell Britomart this, if he could only word it in a way not to hurt her feelings. And Britomart, never dreaming of the reproof so near her brother's lips, went on with her confidences.

"I don't know, I am sure, what makes me feel so bitter towards marriage. Every time I think of being married to Henry Miller—which I sup-

pose I'll have to be; you all seem to think it's the only thing for me to do—it makes me ugly and unhappy; and—do you know, William John, I believe father and mother decided my disposition when they named me Britomart. That means 'Hater of Men.' I found it in the dictionary the other day. And I am a hater of men!"

"I call that down right wicked, sis! You don't hate poor old father, do you, and me, and Frank——?"

"Oh, I mean the human race—man, with a big M, women and children included."

William John was too much shocked to reply. Britomart saw his displeasure in his face. She knew she was making her brother perfectly miserable, but she persisted. She was miserable herself in thinking all these bitter thoughts, and to whom should she go for consolation if not to William John? She could not talk to her mother this way, because it made her so very unhappy, and she was always so tired that Britomart was unwilling to add the slightest weight to her burdens; but William John was young and too optimistic. He was too suddenly contented to go in his father's footsteps and bend his back to the same burdens of hard work, debt, large family, poverty, premature old age.

"Sometimes I think I shall go away and try to get a musical education in the city. I believe I could do it, in some way."

"Oh, pshaw! Britomart; put such discon-

tented notions out of your head. You know enough about music. In a few years you will be married, and then you won't have time for music. Look at Mary Andrews and Sarah Corbin. Nothing would do but they must go to Cranston to be taught music and painting, and then, after their fathers had spent two or three hundred apiece on them, they came home and got married, and Sarah told me at church last Sunday that the only time she ever touched her organ was when she wiped the dust off; that she could not even play church music any more, her hands were so stiff."

"That's the way it goes!" declared Britomart, bitterly. "Let any of us entertain an aspiration, an ambition, and beat our heads against the bars of circumstances—the invincible keeper with an iron goad prods us back to our lair to snarl out our lives in vain. The same old round! I tell you, William John, I hate it! It is so useless, so hopeless. If it only meant anything, if I were doing any one any good by submitting, if I were making a martyr of myself for any one's sake—for poor old father's, or mother's, for you, or Frank, or——"

"Or Frank's child," joked William John.

"Well, I really don't love Frank's child to the degree that I would suffer martyrdom for it—I resent the little nuisance, to tell the truth. As I was saying, if there was any earthly use, I could go on as you are all going on, but there is not. What good will it do if I work and

marry, and work and bear children, and work and grow old, and work and die, and be buried out of sight? Of all my life there would be this record left: 'She worked, but accomplished nothing, save to feed and clothe herself. She has left more mouths and backs in the world to be fed and covered.' That is all."

"But by doing patiently and uncomplainingly that work which lies at your hand, you will have made the people around you happy. Mother and father and us boys first; Henry Miller—if he is your husband—and later all those children you propose having," and William John grinned at his sister. He could not imagine brilliant, high-strung Britomart patiently dandling Henry Miller's children.

"If I married Henry Miller it would not be long before he would wish me and my 'tantrums' in the Red Sea, and the children—I tell you, William John Landor, I can't see how the children of poor people can thank their parents for thrusting existence upon them in this day and age. I am sure I do not."

Britomart was going to say more, and William John had opened his mouth to reply, when a pink face surrounded by a sunbonnet of the same hue, appeared floating on the waves of ripening wheat, and Tilly Leven called out sweetly that she had been up to the old house, had seen Britomart's hat in the meadow, and so came down.

Britomart sniffed disdainfully. "A great deal

she cared for Britomart's hat!" she thought. "It was the hat of William John which attracted her."

That young man's countenance had been knotted with scowls caused by the contemplation of difficulties suggested by his sister's conversation, but it cleared immediately at sight of the pink sunbonnet. Tilly looked very pretty under that bonnet. The color brought out not only the pink of her cheeks, but the pearly shades of neck and forehead. Try it once, ye doubters. Don a pink sunbonnet and see what it will do for your complexions, or hang a pink drapery over your mirror and behold yourselves always young and fresh.

William John gave his seat on the stone to Tilly, and threw himself down on the grass, a happy light in his eyes. The clouds had rolled away. Once more the blackbirds piped, and life seemed right—to him. The gloom on his sister's face was too deep for the shadow of a pink sunbonnet to disperse. She did not feel its presence such an honor as did William John. Any young man around Belleville would feel flattered to have Tilly Leven call upon him in the meadow, and of late she had often shown a preference for William John Landor.

"What were you talking about so fast when I came through the wheat?" asked Tilly.

"I was trying to convince William John that a man who has eaten two fat sandwiches and four big doughnuts, and drunk two cups of cof-

fee, did not need any dinner, but I haven't succeeded, so I must 'go quvigck in der house,' as Martha Schlater would say, and make dinner."

"O, pshaw!" said William John. "It isn't so, Tilly. Tell her what you were saying and see what she thinks about it."

"Thinks about it!" said Britomart, coolly eyeing the pink sunbonnet. "Tilly couldn't think about it."

"What was it?" asked Tilly, a little nettled at the implication in Britomart's remark.

"Politics," answered Britomart.

"No, indeed, then," said Tilly, demurely. "Women, especially young girls, can find something more appropriate to think about."

"It wasn't politics," said William John.

"Then what was it?" asked Britomart, and William John could not name it, for neither of the young people dreamed it was Sociology, not knowing exactly what that word meant.

"By the way, what do you think of, Tilly?"

"What all young girls think of, I presume," answered Tilly, wishing with all her heart that Britomart was at the house getting dinner, and no one in the meadow but William John and herself.

"But I am a young girl, and I am sure you and I do not think of the same things."

Tilly's power of repartee was not her strong point, by any means, but, like most dull people, she sometimes stumbled on a cutting answer. She did just then.

"Oh, you are not so young any more. You are over twenty-two, and I think girls get wise and prosy after they are twenty."

Britomart flushed now, and William John laughed uneasily. He was afraid the girls were going to quarrel; but Britomart only said, "Not you, Tilly, never fear," and Tilly took it as a compliment, and smiled prettily, as Britomart gathered up her dishes and pail and made ready to start for home.

"Talking about politics, I heard something awful about Paul," said Tilly. "When pa was down town the other day, Dan Halbright told him he saw Paul over at Cranston, where he works, and Paul wasn't satisfied with his wages nor nothing, and Dan said he talked just awful about the republican party—said it was just as bad as the democrats. Dan said he was dumbfounded to hear one of John Landor's boys talk that way. Pa says that if Paul was his boy he would be afraid, going over to Cranston to work with all them rough factory men, he would turn democrat."

There was horror and then unbelief pictured in William John's face. "Don't you ever believe it, Tilly," he said. "My brother Paul will never turn democrat. Dan Halbright is always nosing up something terrible. He likes to make folks' eyes stick out."

"Well, I hope it isn't so," said Tilly, piously.

"I don't care if he is a democrat, if he is a good man," declared Britomart, more to be con-

trary than for any other reason, for she possessed the family abhorrence for a democrat in quite as great a degree as did William John.

"Why, Britomart Landor! you know well enough he couldn't be a democrat and still be a good man!" cried Tilly.

"Why?" asked Britomart.

"Because!" said Tilly.

Britomart laughed. "The reason is sufficient. I think it would convince any jury in the land. I thought you never talked politics?"

"I don't; but anybody knows that you can't be any lower down than to be a democrat."

Britomart turned to William John triumphantly. "There you have it in a nutshell. You see we women do think and talk politics—all of us. We believe a certain class of men are fiends and we stick to it and would fight for it, and yet if anybody asks us our reasons, we say, 'It is so because it is so, and so, now!' and go off firmly convinced that no one can dispute our reasons. The women are all that way, and most of the men. It makes me sick!"

"May be she is going to be a democrat," laughed Tilly.

"You needn't fret, but if Paul turns democrat, I shall certainly listen to and try to understand some of his reasons for turning, before I sentence him to slow starvation."

"Well, you may try to understand politics if you have time; I haven't. I am crocheting me

a whole waist, and it will take me all summer to finish it."

William John thought, "What a deft-fingered little body she is, making her own finery; so economical too." Her next remark rather discouraged his admiration in this respect.

"It will take nearly a hundred spools of fine thread."

"At four cents a spool," said Britomart. "Four dollars worth of thread and about one hundred dollars worth of time, and then it will be a saggy, ungainly thing. I would rather get thirty-five cents worth of white muslin and make a really pretty waist. You could put in the rest of the time in making soap-bubbles. No one denies their beauty."

William John was uneasy again. "Don't mind her. She likes to hear herself talk, Tilly. If she meant everything she said, there would be no living with her."

Tilly's cheeks were very red and she was nearly crying. Britomart saw the rebuke in her brother's face and relented at once.

"Everybody to their taste, Tilly. It's all right, and I was just teasing you. I don't know that it will be saggy. Come on; aren't you going now? I've got to get dinner for this lazy fellow, who hasn't done enough haying this forenoon to pay for his lunch, say nothing of dinner. Mother is away from home, and I am alone to-day. Come along, Tilly. Let's go back through the wheat, by the little old house. Oh, by the

way, has your father rented it? I saw the door open and a big box inside as I came down."

"Yes, he has rented it," murmured Tilly, with no great degree of enthusiasm. She was still smarting from the insinuations that a democrat might be a gentleman, and that her crocheted waist would be saggy.

"Tell us about it," urged Britomart. "Is there a large family? Won't it be funny to have new neighbors? I don't like it very well. I like to have the old house empty. I like to flatten my nose against the pane and imagine whomsoever I please living inside."

"I don't think it would pay pa to refuse to rent the house in order that you might flatten your nose against the windows," said Tilly, with what she intended to be biting sarcasm. William John and Britomart both laughed.

"Perhaps," suggested Britomart, "the tenants won't object, in consideration of a small sum, to still grant me the privilege. It might be quite interesting to me."

"It's a man," said Tilly; "just a man, all alone. Pa says he don't see what he wants to rent an old house out in a wheat-field for, but he did, and that's all there is of it. Pa asked him if he was looking for work, and he said the funniest thing. He said no, he was looking for a place to get away from work. I think he is crazy."

"Because he wants to get away from work? I don't; I think he is wise. I'd get away from every bit of it if I could," laughed Britomart.

"I wouldn't," said Tilly, demurely; "I ain't lazy, whatever else I may be."

Britomart caught a smile on the tips of her fingers, and the girls plunged into the wheat together, while William John went back to his work.

"What kind of a looking man is it who has rented the house?" asked Britomart, as they approached the dwelling in question from the rear.

"Oh, he is about as tall as William John. He has a Roman nose, and a lazy way, and the prettiest hands you ever saw. Pa couldn't get anything out of him as to what he intended to do, or why he was renting the house."

The old well-sweep stood outlined against the sky, a gnarled plum tree grew close beside it, the dark weather stains of the cottage served as a background to the picture. It pleased the artistic sense in Britomart. She experienced a thrill of pleasure. She wished the new tenant had not come to spoil her loafing place, for this old well-curb, the plum tree, and a book, had brought her happy hours.

The girls went down the road together until they came to the corner where Tilly turned to go to her own home.

"I think I'll come over a few minutes tonight, after supper," she said. "Will you be at home?"

"Oh, yes," answered Britomart, with a sigh, and Tilly bade her good-bye, graciously ignoring the lack of invitation in Britomart's tone.

"Mighty little she cares whether I want her or not, so long as she wants to come. She'll come, in that persistent way of hers which passes for sweetness, presumably to see me, in reality to see William John, and I shall have to give up my evening's practice and sit dumbly by, while they look unutterable things at each other. Dear me! How I do hate anything that savors of courting! Well, I'll hurry up, and after the dinner dishes are out of the way, I will practice, and I will patch this evening while listening to the dear boy make a fool of himself over that insignificant little thing. And now to make his waffles for him, bless his dear old heart! I wish he might have a little different life—that I might do something grand for him, and the rest."

After dinner, just as Britomart put the last touch to her simple toilet, and opened the piano, happy in the anticipation of a good two hours' practice, the door swung open and old Mr. Spence came in. Mr. Spence was Frank's father-in-law, and considered to be a very disreputable old man, for he was a democrat of the deepest dye.

CHAPTER II.

Old Man Spence was not a handsome man. His face was rugged, and seamed by sixty years of varying weather on a farm, and his long, narrow tuft of white beard was apt to be discolored by tobacco juice. His slovenly habits and objectionable politics did not tend to make him a favorite with the Landor family. Even Frank had harbored a secret dislike for him in the first days of his marriage. It had worn away after two years of intimate acquaintance, but Britomart had not this advantage, so kept her poor opinion intact. She considered the old man particularly objectionable this afternoon, as he settled himself in her mother's chair, and after firing an amber stream of tobacco juice as straight as an arrow into the wood-box, announced with great importance that he had "been sent up to tell 'em that Frank's folks had a boy." Britomart admitted that she was not surprised, and Mr. Spence was a little astonished at her calmness in hearing the news. She inquired solicitously after Mary, and Spence informed her in an off-hand way that "Mary was doin' all right," returning immediately to the more engrossing subject of the boy.

"Darndest little critter ye ever see. Great big feller; eyes jist as blue as a piece er glass."

"Mercy! I hope he hasn't glass eyes, Mr. Spence."

"And jist as bright as a button," continued the infatuated grandfather, ignoring Britomart's flippant remark. "I'm 'glad the first one is a boy."

"The first one and the last, I hope," said Britomart.

"Pooh! what do you old maids know about children? They'll have a dozen—hope they will."

"At least when they do, I hope Frank will be making more than he is nowadays, and be able to lay up a bit. What right, I'd like to know, has Frank, or any other man, to bring children into the world without the least show of educating them? What will become of this poor little piece of humanity? Frank isn't making his living, Mr. Spence; you know that."

"Yes, I know that, just as well as you do. Frank ain't making anything; neither are the rest of 'em. Frank ain't the only one who is running behind. But, Lord bless you! it's hard times now. Things'll take a turn by the time this little duffer gits up in the world—long before, I hope. Yes, sir, times's got to pick up pretty soon or Frank's a goner. Had to borry the money o' me to meet his last two bills with. 'Course you needn't say anything about this. I wouldn't mention it outside the fambly. Mary's the only child I got left out o' ten, and what's mine's hers; but it does seem darn queer 'at Frank's so behindhand."

"You say that all the other merchants in Belleville are the same?"

"Yes, yes, I can't deny that. It's the damned politics, that's what it is. You see, the republicans has had it all their own way for thirty year, and——"

"But we are under democratic administration now, Mr. Spence."

"You can't undo thirty year legislation in one, I can tell you; and besides we ain't under it yet. Cleveland can't do anything till he gits a congress that goes with him, and his party—but good land! What's the use of talking politics to a womarn? They don't know beans about politics. Talk to the women about beaux and babies, not politics."

"But I have neither that I am interested in, and I am very much interested in the politics of my own country, and anxious to understand it a little better. You see, father and the boys and—Henry Miller, are all republicans, so I hear only one side of the question, and sometimes I think they don't more than half know what they are talking about."

"Well, my girl, you struck it there!" Mr. Spence rose excitedly, assumed a more familiar position, with his back to the stove and his hands in his pockets, using the wood-box, meantime, as a cuspidore in a way which alarmed the tidy instincts of the girl, who would be obliged soon to build the fire for tea. "There you've struck it! I ain't got a word to say agin your father,

John Landor; he's as nice a man as ever stepped foot, but he's a fool when it comes to politics. He's too easy. He's a republican because he's allers been a republican. He uses reason in other things, 'cept politics, but in politics he's as blind as a bat. He don't stop to consider that his party has changed since the war; that, in fact, we democrats are upholding the very principles which used to be the war-cry of the republicans. And then there's the tariff. Now, your father knows as well as I do that a high tariff don't help him any. He knows well enough that his wheat don't sell any higher on account of the tariff, and that his coat costs him a good deal more than it would if the tariff on manufactured goods was taken off, that it makes no difference with the price of wool, because we only import a certain long-hair wool for the making of fine goods, a kind of wool which can't be raised in America."

"Isn't the democratic congress fixing the tariff now, Mr. Spence? Why don't we have better times?"

"We shall, we shall, after a little. You wait!"

"I hope you are right. You say I am already an old maid, and all my life I have heard nothing but hard times; and the strangest part of it is, they are just on the point of getting better when along comes a presidential election year and knocks everything in the head again. Every time we have a relapse we get worse."

Mr. Spence stopped at the door to give Brito-

mart another minute description of Frank's baby. "There goes my practice hour for this afternoon!" pouted Britomart. "I must get supper now, and after supper it will be some one else, I suppose." And it was. Mr. Landor came home in the same state of grandfatherly exultation which had characterized Old Man Spence.

"Cunningest little thing, Britomart. You'd die a laughing to see him double up his firsts and strike out. Eyes as blue as the sky. I never saw so young a child that was so smart."

"Oh, I've heard all this before," laughed Britomart.

"Who's tellin' you?"

"Old Spence."

"Ha! ha! Well, you'd laugh to see that old goose—just hung right over that young one the minute it was born. The women-folks and I had to shove him out of the room."

"So you could hang over it, I presume, hey, father? Poor child! It's in danger of being smothered by grandparents; mother and Mrs. Spence all the time, and you and Old Spence spasmodically."

Mr. Landor brought word that his wife would stay in town a spell, until the baby was well started on its earthly career, and Britomart proceeded to do up the supper dishes with the lonely feeling she always experienced when her mother was gone. Before they were finished Tilly Leven came down to pay the promised visit, and after

listening with many expressions of astonishment and delight to Mr. Landor's long account of the wonder which had come to town, found her way out under the apple tree, where she and William John exchanged confidences with a low hum, "like a swarm of bees," as Britomart said.

Britomart sat down at the piano with a guilty feeling of apprehension, for well she knew who would come soon—her lover—and she would much rather he would stay away. "What is the reason," she asked herself fearfully, "that I always dread to see him coming? I should not feel that way towards the man I am thinking of marrying. I am sure William John doesn't feel so when Tilly Leven appears. His face lights up like a lantern, and he seems never so happy as when he can sit and talk to her the entire evening. It must be because I do not love him. But why in the world do I not love him? Shall I never love anybody? Am I different from the rest of my kind? He is good, he is the only young man who has ever noticed me in the least. I should feel grateful to him, if nothing more. He is quite a catch, too—a young editor; and father and mother are delighted at the prospect of the match. Oh, well, I presume all women feel as I do at times. Mother told me once that, really, she cared very little for father when she married him, and was more than half in love with a young man who never amounted to anything; but that now she worshiped every hair on dear old father's head.

It is hard to understand yourself. It is hard to take your soul in your hand and examine it, to fathom the why and the wherefore. I wish I could feel as sure of my love for Henry Miller as I do of that for my father and mother and the dear old boys, or my music—how I do love my music, and how far I am from the heart of it.”

She sat down to the piano in the stuffy little front room. The door looking out on the front walk stood open. The walk, bordered by stiff poplars, ended at the garden gate. Britomart played on, always with the consciousness of listening fearfully for the click of the gate and her lover's step on the walk. The barns were across the road from the house, and back of them the grove rose solemn and dark against the blaze of the western sky. Mr. Landor, on the small porch, read his weekly paper, and had it not been for the unpleasant anticipation of the gate-click, the homely peace, the beauty of the night and her own music would have made Britomart happy.

Suddenly the warning sounded, the gate clicked sharply. He had come. Well, she would keep on playing until he rapped or made some other demonstration to make his presence known. Perhaps he would go to the porch and talk awhile with her father. She hoped he would do so. She played on—no sound. She repeated the rondo which she had been playing, and, influenced by her wish to remain alone, her dis-

content, her longing, she played with much feeling. There was something of her mood voiced in her music. Then her hands fell from the keys with a sigh and she swung round on the stool.

A man was sitting on the stone steps which led up to the door. He wore a velveteen coat over a negligee shirt, the collar of which lay comfortably loose about his throat. His profile, which was the view Britomart first had of him, was rendered remarkable by a prominent Roman nose, a firm sweet mouth, and a strong chin. He was sitting quite still, gazing at the western sky, and clasping a crush hat about his knees with hands which were long, white and fine. Britomart recognized him from Tilly's description as the tenant of the old house. But little did she dream at that moment of the new influence which had come into her life; that when those slender hands, with their steely strength, would beckon her to new and dangerous ventures, she would follow; that from those keen eyes and gentle, smiling lips would emanate commands she would have no will nor wish to disobey.

He arose when she stopped playing, and bowing with just the ghost of a smile, said: "You are Miss Landor, I believe. I am Dennis Blair. I have recently rented the cottage west of here, in the wheat-field, and I was told I might possibly find board at Mrs. Landor's. You were playing when I came through the gate, and I

took the liberty of enjoying your music unasked. I love to play, or to listen to music on nights like this, when the sun is setting."

"You play, then?" asked Britomart.

"Yes," he answered. "Will you permit me?" and he seated himself at the piano.

Britomart sat down in the doorway, unconsciously assuming the attitude in which she had first seen her visitor, her hands clasping her knees, her eyes turned towards the glowing west.

Never, in all her limited experience, had Britomart seen a man at the piano. It was not a common sight in the vicinity of Belleville. She knew, of course, that in the world men played the piano, but she had never happened to see one. At first the novelty of it absorbed her, but presently the charm of the music began to weave its spell about her. It was music she had never heard before. At first it seemed weak and jumbled—too complicated to be understood or enjoyed—but presently those soft, rapid notes produced a sense of rest after great weariness, of sleep, of utter forgetfulness.

Meanwhile the glow went out of the west entirely, and a cool night wind sprang up. The parlor darkened, but the musician needed no light. The music deepened, swayed and trembled, assuming a martial ring. Britomart was conscious of a feeling of hope, of strength, a knowledge that she might do great things, suffer and be strong for the love she bore her kin or country. Her love of music and her suscepti-

bility to its influences made her soul an instrument, the strings of which the steely, white fingers were striking simultaneously with the old piano keys. The piano was old, its best days done, but the harp of the woman's soul was new, and attune to the possibilities of great endeavor. To Britomart, as she sat and gazed, it seemed as though a panorama of her life, as she wished it might be, opened in the western sky. To be, to do, to suffer, for great ideals. She would have liked to walk rapidly, or sway back and forth in time to the music. There was a look of inspiration on her face, of intent though suppressed emotion in her attitude.

The man at the piano finished, and turning, caught something of her mood. He regarded her silently—impersonally. There was none of the admiration of a man for a pretty woman in his gaze, but instead a speculation, a summing up of the possible capabilities in the girl before him.

Mr. Landor came around from the side porch as the music stopped.

"I was just coming to hear you play, Britomart," he said, with his usual sunny smile. Britomart stood up. The man at the piano left the stool and came out upon the stone platform.

"My playing!" exclaimed Britomart. "Father, did you really think it was I who was playing?"

"Of course I did."

"It was this gentleman. This is my father,

Mr. Blair. Mr. Blair has called to see about boarding with us."

Mr. Landor led the way into the house. "Come in, come in. I don't know, I am sure. My wife ain't to home, but Britomart here has as much to say about it as her mother, I suppose. What do you think your mother would say, Britomart?"

"Are you a teacher of music?" asked Britomart, eagerly.

For the space of a moment the man hesitated, then answered in the affirmative. "Perhaps I might hope to obtain you for my pupil, giving lessons in part payment for my board. I do not require lodgings. I have rented the cottage west of here."

"Oh, father, do you suppose mother would care?"

William John and Tilly appeared at this moment, Tilly having started for home, after her most delightful evening visiting Britomart.

"William John, this gentleman, Mr. Blair, is a music teacher, and wants to board with us. He will give me lessons. Do you think mother would care? Miss Leven, this is Mr. Blair. I presume you have met before, as he rented the house from your father."

Yes, Miss Leven had met Mr. Blair earlier in the day.

"Why, mother won't care if you say it's all right. You have as much of the work to do as mother," said William John, pleasantly.

The stranger smiled at William John, and the boy returned the smile with a broad, honest, farmer boy's grin.

"You didn't say anything about being a music teacher, or perhaps we might have taken you ourselves," said Tilly, in an aggrieved tone of voice. She felt that in some way Britomart had defrauded her of a chance to get music lessons cheap.

"Do you give lessons on the accordion?"

William John felt himself blushing for Tilly. He loved music, although knowing nothing of the science. He liked to see Tilly with her favorite instrument in her hands, but did not altogether enjoy the music she extracted from it. She possessed a cabinet organ, but preferred the accordion, because she could arrive at an effect without so much labor. It took time to learn to play the organ, and she needed time for her crocheting. William John, who knew nothing of this pressure of fancy-work, and supposed the reason the organ stood shut and voiceless was for lack of instruction, determined that if this man staid long and gave his sister lessons, Tilly should take, also, at his expense. A few lessons, he felt sure, would enable Tilly to rise above Britomart's ridicule.

If Britomart expected to see an answering ridicule in Mr. Blair's face she was disappointed. He admitted to Miss Leven, gravely and politely, that the only instruments with which he was familiar were the violin and piano, the latter but

in a superficial degree. His manner conciliated Miss Leven considerably. She did not wish to take lessons on any instrument except the accordion, so was willing that her father's tenant should board with the Landors. However, she wished the man had told her what his business was.

Britomart decided she had better not give Mr. Blair an answer until she had consulted her mother on the subject. He was to come the next evening to hear the decision. Meanwhile William John would go to Belleville to lay the case before Mrs. Landor. Mr. Blair was to come to dinner just the same.

All the next forenoon Britomart went about with a new light shining in her eyes. This stranger's music had opened a door to her—a door of promise. Now and then she would leave the kitchen and going to the piano play her own familiar music, trying to catch the touch, to infuse the passion into it which she had recognized in the man's playing. She hoped he would play again when he came to dinner, but he did not. He sat under the trees and talked politics with her father and William John, or rather encouraged them to talk without expressing many opinions himself. Tilly Leven came after dinner, and the two girls went down where the men were resting and talking. It was very sweet there in the shade of the Balm of Giliad tree, with its varnished leaves. Tilly had been sent by her mother to borrow some "emptins."

Britomart knew why Tilly had postponed washing her dishes until after her errand was done, so led the way at once down under the trees. Blair relinquished the bench to them and stretched himself on the grass, his head supported on his hand. Britomart noticed how graceful the lines of his long, lithe body were. She had thought him very plain at first. Today something in his gaunt cheeks, narrow, deep-set eyes, hooked nose and hard, handsome mouth, fascinated her as mere regularity of feature could not have done.

There was much that was interesting in the conversation also. Tilly considered it very stupid, and made several vain attempts to draw William John away from the rest. She wanted to tell him of a party which was in prospect, and to which she wished him to be her escort, but William John felt that this stranger was in an overt manner attacking his father's good, stanch, political convictions, and he wanted to hear his father—in whom he had the greatest confidence—convince this man of his mistakes. William John, despite his awkward youth, had a keen, thoughtful mind, and, although he would not own it, much better powers of argument than his father. Although he liked this man, he did not relish hearing him make the assertion that the republican party was not the same good, honest old party it had ever been, fighting for liberty and the good of all men. Hence the blandishments of Tilly were passed by unheeded.

"I believe in high tariff," his father was saying. "I believe in protecting our own manufacturing interests from them there fellows over in Europe who can git men to work for next to nothing, and then bring stuff over here to cut down the prices of labor in this country."

"But some of the most highly protected industries are the most wretchedly paid. How do you explain that? The cotton manufactures, for instance."

"Don't you believe in the tariff?" cried William John, in much the same tone of voice in which he would have asked, "Don't you believe in God?"

"No, my boy, I do not," answered Blair.

"Why, you must be a democrat!"

A thrill of horror shot through Tilly Leven. The accused smiled slowly, showing a set of fine teeth. "No," he answered, "I am afraid I am not conservative enough to be a good democrat?"

"What do you mean by that?" demanded William John, determined to ascertain just where this poor wanderer did stand, if it took all the afternoon.

"Why, I mean that a good democrat will swallow almost anything that is given to him in a spoon marked Democracy. So long as it bears the old name, whether it be good or ill, he takes it willingly, gladly."

Mr. Landor laughed.

"And you, too, are a republican, I understand," said Blair, addressing William John.

"You bet I am!" answered William John, loudly, the proud young blood mounting into his cheeks. He felt strong to defend the right against this ignorant teacher of music, a pleasant enough fellow, to be sure, but ignorant, woefully ignorant of politics.

"Why are you a republican?" asked Blair.

It was hardly fair to tackle a boy this way. "I am a republican," blustered William John, "because—it's the best party—because father is, for one reason."

Mr. Landor laughed again. "You must give a better reason than that, William John, a better reason than that."

Blair said gravely: "That is a very common reason, and, for a boy with an honest father, whom he loves and respects, it is a very natural reason. I had a good republican father, one who voted the straight ticket year after year. He was a hard-working, honest man, a machinist by trade. He fought three years in the war and came home in the belief that there were long years of happiness in store for him. He had been ready to lay down his life in the service of the country that he loved, and confidently expected to receive in return the privilege of earning an honest living for himself and family by the sweat of his brow. He voted for the protective tariff because he was led to believe that in building up the industries of the country the

manufacturers would be enabled to give better wages.

“The facts were these: My father’s wages decreased instead of increasing. The tariff principles of his party made clothing and household necessities higher, but there was no corresponding rise in his wages. The tariff did not shut out foreign emigration, and competition became so strong that he found himself begging humbly for a chance to work at all—a thing he would have scorned to do in earlier days, for he was a good workman. The city grew up about him, rent became so high it was impossible for him to provide other than a wretched home for his wife and children. He was told continually by his fellow-workmen that he was in hard luck, having a family to support. He had thought it the best of luck to possess a sweet wife and three little children. His best impulses were born through his life with and love for them. He came to realize that over half the men with whom he worked had no families because it was becoming impossible for a working man to support one decently on the small and uncertain wages of their class. They herded together in dirty boarding houses, and in place of having a home to go to at night, they went to saloons and brothels. They were never sure of a job for more than three months in a place; then they made ready to tramp, and tramp it was literally, because of the life they led they had no money as a usual thing.

"One year, owing to strikes and an overcrowded condition of the labor market, he had only three months' work during the entire year. I was getting to be a strapping fellow then. We were on the verge of starvation. He said to me one day: 'Dennis, I can't understand it. America is a great and glorious country, but there is something wrong, not because we are poor and starving, but we are not alone. All laboring men are in the same boat. The men we work for are getting too rich, while we are getting too poor. Some say it is the machinery, some say over-production. I don't know, Dennis, my boy, I don't know. I only know I wish you had never been born to struggle and be beaten as I have been.'

"The next day he died, and I swore by the God that reigns above us that I would know, that I would find out 'the something' that was wrong. Other minds which were greater and better than mine were studying it out also, and with their help, and my own observation and experience, I have reached conclusions which I find justified every day."

Dennis Blair had risen, and with his thumbs lightly caught in his trousers pockets, his hat on the back of his head, his face pale and his thin lips compressed tightly he seemed to personify to Britomart the oppressed labor class, rising in its manly intelligence and newly acquired knowledge against the oppressors.

"But," said John Landor, "you don't tell me

that the republican party was the cause of this ruin?"

"It certainly did not prevent it," answered Blair. "For all my father's faith, it did not prevent it. It allowed the abuses which have made it possible for the few to grasp what belongs to the many. My father was but one of millions. You do not feel the pressure here as yet, in any great measure; and still you are wronged. You have spent a life of honest toil upon this farm, you have had glorious harvests, the sun, wind and rain have been good to you. That which you produce with so much labor and weariness, the world reaches out eager hands to receive. There are hungry mouths, never half filled, longing for that produce; there are toil-grimmed thousands ready to pay for it fairly with labor not a whit less arduous than your own. But what is the result? A transportation king takes the first half of your profits, and a millionaire, with an option on pork and grain, the speculator, the man on exchange, take the lion's share of the remainder. You work blindly on, hoping for better times, misled by lying demagogues and a press belonging body and soul to your enemies. But, pshaw! I am taking your time. Your team should be in the field."

"I don't believe a word of it!" began William John, but his father turned upon him sharply, and William John, not being used to a rebuke from his gentle, laughing old father, was startled by his vehemence.

"I should, some day, like to talk with you again on this subject, Mr. Blair. I believe, as you say, there is something wrong, but just what, I have never been able to put my finger on."

"Haven't I always told you so?" cried Britomart. "Haven't I always said you didn't get your just dues? And mother—nothing better than a slave all her life. Mrs. Leven is just as bad, and most of the farmers' wives; but they do not feel it as my mother has. What is life, I want to ask you, when it is work, work, and never a glimpse of the things you yearn for? You want an hour at the piano, you get eight hours at the wash-tub. Now, I wouldn't mind four at the piano and four at the tub, but with my poor mother it has been all tub and no piano. So it would be with me if I should marry a farmer."

"Or a mechanic, or a factory hand, Miss Lander, or any man who earns his living by manual labor. It was, once upon a time, a free and independent way of living; it has come to be the life of a slave."

Britomart had started from her seat. She flung out her hands with a gesture unconsciously dramatic.

"You tell us of the symptoms of the disease, but you speak of no remedy."

Dennis Blair shook his head. "Ah, the remedy, I fear, will be long in being recognized. What would you think of a sick man who held

a phial in his hand containing a sure cure for his disease, yet slowly died because he believed it wicked to interfere with the will of Divine Providence, which had sent the affliction upon him? You would say that the man's fanatical faith was large enough to accept the disease, but not large enough to understand that a good God had also sent a remedy. A little research, a little thought, would have helped the man to understand."

"I wish there was something in the world a woman could do for the sake of her race. I would devote my life to it!"

Blair regarded her with that look of speculation in his eyes which had appeared there on their first meeting.

"Don't make any rash promises, Miss Lander," he said, laughing. "The first thing for either man or woman to do nowadays is to read and think. With your father's permission I will loan you this little book. If you have time I should like you to read it also," he said, turning to William John.

"It won't hurt William John to read it, but it would take but mighty little to make a rebel of Britomart. She's like one of these here little bantams, with big spurs, not very well fitted for it, but always ready for a fight," laughed Mr. Lander, following William John to the barn for the team.

Tilly, a bit piqued at her defeat all along the

line, sat poutingly pulling and braiding the long grasses.

Britomart took the book, and with a hectoring smile said, "Thank you, I will read it aloud to Tilly this afternoon."

"No," said Tilly hastily, "my folks would not approve of my listening to sermons on politics. They don't think that's a woman's business; neither do I. And we are not slaves, either, I'd have you know, Miss Britomart Landor."

"Oh, you have a great advantage over some people; you are like the Irishman's snake—you are dead, but you are not sensible of it. It's much easier to get along that way."

"Oh, very well! Of course you don't care to associate with slaves, so I will bid you and Mr. Blair a good afternoon."

Blair went with her to the gate, which he held open, while the offended young lady swept through, a good deal mollified by this unusual act of politeness. She saw no other reason for it but that, absolutely infatuated with her beauty, the fellow did it as a rebuff to saucy Britomart.

"And the greatest of these is charity!" quoted Blair, coming back to the bench under the tree. "If you are to devote your life to the people, the ignorant people, Miss Landor, the first requisite is infinite pity—and charity."

"But she's such a fool," sighed Britomart.

"Yes, but it is the fools in place of the knaves who keep the world where it is. We have to deal principally with fools, and must learn to

do so gently. You lose forever your influence over a person as soon as that person becomes angry with you. You cannot convince them then."

"She'll come back tonight," said Britomart, laughing, "as soon as William John drives the team into the barn."

"The old, old story," said Blair, smiling, and bidding Britomart good afternoon, started up the sandy hill toward his cottage, leaving her fumbling curiously the first leaves of the book he had loaned her.

Tilly Leven, looking back, saw Blair leave Britomart, apparently disconsolate, under the tree almost immediately after her own departure, and tossed her head disdainfully.

"Big homely thing!" she muttered, "I guess she's made up her mind that she ain't as much consequence as she thinks she is. She sits down there feeling pretty cheap at this minute!"

But she was mistaken. Britomart had already forgotten both of her visitors in the perusal of the book, which was the new gospel founded on the old, and whose sum and substance was "Peace on earth, good will to men."

CHAPTER III.

Farmer Leven called to Farmer Landor across the line fence next day, as they were working in their respective fields. Mr. Leven responded to the neighborly demand by coming to the fence and resting one foot on the bottom board, his elbows on the top.

Leven was a dull man, with heavy lips and a long nose. He was round shouldered from unremitting toil, and his face bore a look of chronic melancholy. He came slowly through the wheat, "taking his time," as Landor thought. He wished the old fellow would hurry up. He had just started William John around to cut the first swath in the south field. Harvest was regularly begun, and he felt the farmer's well known pride in his first round.

"Ain't you cuttin' pretty early?" asked Leven, in a voice which was always a surprise to strangers, it was so high and squeaky, to come from such a heavy, mournful face. Mrs. Leven's face partook of this same mournfulness.

"Oh, no," answered Landor; "it has been ready three days, but William John and I being alone, we wanted to finish up the hay, and I knew this wasn't goin' to hurt."

"What's that stuff my girl was tellin' me about that fellow that's livin' in my house up there, talkin' to your folks? By her tell I shouldn't think he was safe to have round."

"Oh, I guess he's all right. Don't believe just as you and I do about politics, but you know there's many a good man don't do that."

"Hey?" asked Old Leven, in a dazed sort of way. He was a bit slow, and, as Britomart said of him, he always wanted to be sure he was right before he went ahead.

"Why, I say there are lots of good men who ain't republicans."

"I don't know who they air; I don't know who they air; I never seen any of 'em."

"Oh, pshaw! There's old Mr. Spence, he isn't a bad old man."

"I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a pig by the tail!" squealed Mr. Leven. "I know he's kinder in your family, but I do say it, I wouldn't trust him, an' I never seen a democrat 'at I would! If I'd a known this feller was a democrat I wouldn't a let him onto no property o' mine!"

"Oh, he ain't a democrat."

"Hey?"

"He's no democrat?"

"What is he, then?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Hey?"

"I say I don't know."

"My girl said he give your girl a book to read."

"Yes."

"He needn't give my girl no book to read. My girl's got suthin' better to do than to set

an' read books. I don't think it does girls any good to read. We've allers had too much to do to our house to be readin' books an' papers. He needn't give none o' my womarn folks books. That's the way lots of mischief is done in the world—lots of mischief is brought about just by this readin'."

John Landor laughed. "Well, Leven, I think I've got an extra bright girl and I love to see her with a book. Let him lend her all the books he wants. He asked us all to read it."

"Hey?" asked old Leven, weakly, but on a long sentence like this, Landor usually failed to repeat, and given time, Leven soaked it in and came to understand it without.

"Lots of mischief comes of this readin'. Fust thing you know, William John'll git to turnin' democrat. I tell you, John Landor, if he should, he couldn't have my girl. No girl o' mine shall ever marry a democrat!"

"We'll have to let the young folks settle that among themselves," said John Landor, with his usual broad grin, as he left the fence.

"Hey?"

"We'll have to let the boys and girls fix that up to suit themselves."

"No, we won't, I jucks! No girl of mine fixes up anything with a democrat!" Old Leven went back to his work muttering curses on all democrats.

"Britomart would 'a said awful cute things to him if she'd a heard him," chuckled John

Landor, as he went back to the field, and the wicked old father laughed aloud in thinking of the sarcastic things Britomart would have said if old Leven had made his complaint in her hearing; but John Landor would not needlessly hurt a fly, much less the feelings of a neighbor.

After tea Britomart knew her lover would come, and she went upstairs in a listless manner to put a few touches to her toilet. William John was already half way to Belleville on an embassy to the powers that governed, on behalf of Blair as a boarder. Blair had been to tea and gone back to his cottage on the hill. He was to come back about nine to learn the verdict. John Landor told him, laughing, that this was mere form, that Britomart had declared for him and his case was virtually won.

Miller arrived in due time. Britomart watched him coming up the walk. He was a stocky, prosperous-looking man, with a stubby moustache and thick neck, and wore glasses of the pince-nez style. He swaggered proudly up the walk, fully aware that he was conferring a favor upon any woman by honoring her with his addresses, especially a country girl, who had not the advantages of Belleville society. She repressed an inclination to shudder. Her mother had been very much pleased when this man began to show her attentions. She knew her brother Frank felt it an honor that the editor of the Belleville "Weekly" should favor his sister. William John and her father attended to the

horse always, on his arrival, with almost servile alacrity. What was she to do? She knew what the trouble was now; since reading that little book she did not want to marry anyone. She wanted to live for humanity, to live and work for—whom, for the people? She had no incentive to work for the people. She hated them. Such cattle, to be driven, coaxed and deceived. Perhaps for revenge for the wrongs she had suffered. Whatever she wanted, it was not marriage. The idea was more than ever abhorrent to her just at present.

All unconscious of the difficult mood influencing his lady-love, Mr. Miller stepped airily into the parlor,—of course, Britomart received “her fellow” in the parlor, in orthodox country fashion, blinds down, lamp lighted, photograph album at hand.

“Well, I didn’t expect to find you home for the next two weeks. Expected you couldn’t keep away from Frank’s. Nice baby up there, I hear?”

“So they tell me.”

“Don’t mean to say you haven’t seen it yet? Pshaw! I don’t believe you. Women always go crazy over them.”

Britomart stated that she was an exception and that she didn’t care for children.

“You’ll get over that when you come to see the young man. Saw him myself this morning,—fine boy, I tell you. Frank is as tickled as a dog with two tails.”

Britomart registered a vow then and there, that she would guard against loving that child, if only to be contrary. It would not be very hard, she felt.

"I tell Frank we will be having him running for assemblyman on the republican ticket, one of these days."

"I hope not," sighed Britomart.

"What's that?" asked Miller. Then Britomart remembered a political discussion she had once listened to between old Mr. Spence and Miller, and she wisely avoided getting him started on his favorite theme. She declared she had said nothing. Then Miller inquired after the harvest. How was William John and Tilly Leven coming on? He detailed a very witty thing he had perpetrated on William John down in Frank's store the other night, about keeping such late hours; some one asked how late, and Miller answered 'till eleven.' By George! The whole store just roared. William John got as red as fire, but he had to laugh."

Just then it dawned upon Miller that Britomart was quieter than usual. He chuckled her under the chin and asked her if she was mad or jealous. He was accustomed at about this period in his visits to become a little ardent.

Was she dull? She did not wish to appear dull. She brightened up and related a funny incident connected with a little farm boy, who was their neighbor on the east. This set Miller into a perfect avalanche of dialect stories. He

prided himself on the rendition of them, especially the Dutch, which Britomart did not consider him good at. She laughed heroically, however, although she recognized many of them as clippings from Miller's exchanges. Oh, the dreariness of it! Would the evening never end?

William John returned and said Britomart was to do as she pleased about taking the boarder, and he was going to bed to rest up for a hard day's work tomorrow. Miller warmed over his old joke about Tilly Leven, and William John grinned obediently.

"Who is this fellow William John was speaking of?" asked Miller.

Britomart explained.

"Rented old Leven's house? Got a family? No? Then what in creation did he want of a house? What sort of a looking tramp was he? Oh, a music teacher, eh?" Well, that settled it for Miller. "Why in creation didn't he come down into Belleville, where there was something to do in that line? Funny place for a music teacher to locate, out in a wheat field." Miller must find out how long he had been in the state. Perhaps he would be qualified to vote at the fall election. He must do a little missionary work. "Expecting him tonight?" All the better, he would pump him a bit.

"Please do not talk politics," pleaded Britomart. She felt, in some way, that she was responsible for Henry Miller, his political beliefs,

and intellectual limitations. She knew what a blusterer he was, and how this keen Dennis Blair, with his all-covering charity for fools, would, nevertheless, classify her lover. She dreaded the meeting on Blair's account also. She could not endure the thought of the blundering abuse Miller would undoubtedly subject him to as soon as he discovered the stranger's politics, or lack of politics. Politics was Miller's stronghold. Three-fourths of his dingy little paper was filled with his protestations of regard for the men of his own party, and what was supposed to be telling sarcasms against their opponents. Those who were on his side said, "Miller's pretty cute. He gives it to 'em." Those of the opposite persuasion declared him "a flannel-mouth" of the worst type.

"Well, I know, as a usual thing, ladies aren't interested in politics; but, you see, I am always wide awake to win a vote on the right side. So you don't like politics?"

"Not as you talk it," answered Britomart.

"Not as I talk it? Why?"

"Because you get abusive."

Miller laughed uproarously. "Why, my dear, that's the way every one talks politics."

Britomart did not answer, for at that moment there was a light tap at the door, and the next instant she was introducing the two men, and waiting for the war to begin. But it would be a relief, even a wordy war would be a relief, to the deadly monotony of the evening. In her mind

she looked down a long perspective of such evenings, which led to the grave, all spent in this man's company.

"I can't do it!" She started. She feared she had spoken the words aloud, they were so strongly in her mind. She decided to keep Blair the rest of the evening, until Miller went away, if possible. He would probably begin making love to her after Blair's departure, and she had no wish to hear it—not tonight, at least.

Miller was persistently pumping the stranger in regard to his previous abode and present business. No one can do this in so great perfection as a country editor or an inquisitive old farmer.

"Intend living here right along?"

"No, not right along."

"Come from Milwaukee?"

"Not lately."

"Live in the state?"

"Not in this state."

"Acquainted in Chicago?"

"To some extent?"

How could he expect to get a class of music out in a wheat field? He already had as many pupils as he could accommodate. Miller rather opened his eyes at this, and then explained it by simply regarding the man as a liar.

"I guess you could take a couple more if you were hard pushed, couldn't you?" he insinuated, with a very obvious wink at Britomart. He knew of a couple who were quite anxious to take lessons. Blair patiently reiterated his avowal

that he wished no more pupils. Miller presumed his choosing an intensely republican section of country as an abiding place meant that he was sound on the all-important question of tariff. Blair asserted that to the best of his knowledge and belief he was sound on the tariff question. Miller was going on with the inquisition, but Blair turned to Britomart.

"Will you favor us with a little music, Miss Landor?"

Britomart, much to Miller's surprise, arose at once and went to the piano. She was apt to be stubborn in the matter of playing for company, although he was not in the habit of troubling her by fervid petitions for music. Britomart at the piano might as well be Britomart asleep,—better, in fact, for that would only be the isolation of Britomart, minus what to Miller was a disagreeable and unnecessary noise. Music was, to him, an unknown quantity. He often told his friends the only music he could see any beauty in was Old Man Rafter's fife and Jack Peter's drum. He liked to hear them at the head of a torch-light procession at election. They stirred a fellow up.

Britomart played only such simple pieces as she was entirely sure of. Blair listened, well pleased with the girl's modesty in choosing such music in the presence of one whom she knew to be so much her superior in the art. When she was through, without a moment's intermission, she invited Blair to take her place, and he,

whether in answer to an appealing look in her eyes, or because he felt it would be a pleasure to annoy Miller, sat down and played, wonderfully—played to Britomart alone, forgetting, after a time, the very presence of a third person, and Britomart felt again the same charm, the uplifting ambition, which had come to her before while she listened to his music.

Poor Miller yawned openly, fidgeted in his chair, gazed up with a vacant air at the picture of the Sistine Madonna and the cherubs who loaf in the foreground, and wished he had a support for his own chin. At last he grew sullen. What did Britomart mean by sitting with that rapt look on her face, while that "fellow" pounded away? She was putting it on, trying to impress him with her knowledge of something which to him was nothing. He would punish her; he would show her that she must make more of an effort to please him, and him alone, if she expected to retain his valuable attentions; so he interrupted the music rather rudely by saying that he guessed he must be going. Perhaps he did not recognize the look of relief on Britomart's face as such, but Blair did, and was satisfied. Miller bade them a very stiff good evening, and took himself off, followed soon after by Blair. Britomart blew out the lamp at once for fear Miller, coming from the barn with his horse, and seeing Blair's departure, would return for an after interview. She heard voices, and she knew William John, in place of going

to bed, had probably gone up to Leven's, and returning, been in time to assist Miller with the horse. She heard the wheels rattle across the little bridge, and soon after William John came up the walk from the gate. Britomart was sitting in the door of the dark parlor.

"You went to bed a heap," she said, with mock sarcasm. William John laughed and sat down for a minute's chat.

"Father to bed?"

"I suppose so."

"Miller went away early tonight, for him."

"Yes," said Britomart, "and I'm glad of it! William John, I hate him."

"Oh, pshaw, Britomart, don't talk so silly. He's a good fellow and will make a kind, substantial husband. Why, half the girls in Belleville would jump at him for a man."

"Well, let them jump, then. I don't believe I want him. I don't want anybody, William John."

"That's silly. You've got to marry somebody, and I don't know of anybody around here I would rather see you have than Miller, for my part. He's a good fellow and quite well-to-do, considering. Mother and father like him, you know that. I asked Frank what he thought of Miller and you one day, and he said—" Here William John paused.

"Well, what did he say?"

"Why, you know how funny Frank is. He said—but what he really meant was that he

would be well pleased with Miller as a brother-in-law."

"But what did he say?" persisted Britomart.

"He said," laughed William John, "that he supposed he would have to do."

"That's it," said Britomart, springing up and spreading out her hands, "there's the whole thing in a nutshell. 'He'll have to do!' I've got to marry somebody or go to the poorhouse, and this pestilential Miller bids for me as he would for a good buggy horse—healthy, young, and reasonably kind in harness. What difference does it make to him if the horse doesn't want him for a master, so long as he is satisfied? I tell you, William John Landor, I hate him, and I'm not going to stand it. I have tried and tried to adjust myself and feel what the girls call love for this man. I have imagined it would come to me after a little. For months I have endured him because mother and father seemed so pleased, but tonight it came to me all at once that I just couldn't, and that's all. I shall never marry!"

"But what will become of you?" asked William John, gloomily.

"I'll just come and live with you and Tilly. What's a brother for, I'd like to know if not to look out for one." There was a mischievous light in her eyes, but William John had canvassed this dilemma already and now said, soberly, "If you and Tilly would only be friends, I should be only too glad to take care of you, but

she is always saying that you dislike her. She thinks you are jealous of her good looks."

Britomart laughed bitterly. "Perhaps I am, I don't know."

"She says you abused her yesterday when she came to see you."

"I did," confessed Britomart.

"Well, what makes you do it?" pleaded William John, taking Britomart's hand with a brotherly squeeze.

"Because she is such a fool," said Britomart.

"She is no more of a fool than you are, Britomart. Because she doesn't like just what you do, you call her a fool. I think if you are fond of me you ought to make a sister of the girl I hope to marry."

"But, William John, why do you hope to marry that girl? She is not as smart nor as good as you. What is there about her which attracts you?"

"Britomart, a man cannot explain what attracts or repels him in a girl, so you ought just to let him have his own way in the marrying business, and if his choice doesn't suit, make the best of it."

"What's the matter with that rule in the case of a girl, I'd like to know?" asked Britomart.

"Oh, with a girl it's different, you see. She has to take whoever comes for her, so the rule doesn't apply."

"There's one girl who means to make it apply, and if she perishes, why then she perishes,"

laughed Britomart. "Now, go to bed, and I wouldn't fret about my wife and sister quarreling, if I were you, not yet awhile. Good-night."

Britomart would have gone in, but William John laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"There is one thing more I want to say," he began, hesitatingly. "It's about this Dennis Blair. Don't let him get a hold on you, Britomart. He is a taking fellow, I know that, because I can't help but like him myself; and with his music, which you love, and all, he might have more influence over you than you would imagine, and he is a stranger, you know. We don't know a thing about him. He may be a burglar, or a man running away from the sheriff."

"Are you afraid I might be led to break into Spence's house some night and steal that soup-ladle Mrs. Spence brought from the old country?"

"Don't joke always, Britomart. I can see that it is partly on account of him that you have taken such a sudden dislike to Henry Miller. You see, such things affect you without your knowing it. You heard him at the piano playing lovely music; he has nice, polite ways—even Tilly noticed that; and, somehow, I don't like the way he looks at you. He doesn't look at Tilly that way, and Tilly is a—well, Britomart—you know, usually, the young men admire Tilly more than they do you. Of course, when they come to know you——"

"Never mind," laughed Britomart, "never mind, William John; you've made it about as bad as you can. I believe you are right about it's being the contrast between the two men which has bred a stronger dislike in me for Henry Miller; but you may rest assured of one thing, old William John—I had a good lively antipathy for Henry Miller before I ever set eyes on Dennis Blair."

"I don't know about that, but I do know that I wish ma was home, and that you were down to Frank's, while this fellow is boarding here."

For ten days regularly Dennis Blair came for dinner, talked for a half hour with the farmer and his children under the Balm of Giliad tree, and went his way in the afternoon when the men went to the field, sometimes walking with them if their way led toward the cottage in the wheat. After awhile the wheat was cut and stood in fragrant stooks about the house. Old Mr. Leven kept a curious eye on his tenant while his work kept him near the house, but all he succeeded in finding out was that sometimes, though not often, he lay in the hammock, strung between the dwarf plum trees, and read. Almost always Spence saw him sitting at a table with many books and pamphlets about him, and he concluded that Blair was a very lazy, "no account" man. The idea of a man lying in the hammock, or sitting in the house good harvest weather. Britomart, on the other hand, saw

traces of weariness in her boarder's face, and knew that he was working hard.

There was always a cosy hour after supper when she and her father would sit on the side porch and talk to Dennis Blair. Britomart always counted those moments as among the happiest of her life. The talk was always earnest, and several times lasted far into the night, while the crickets, gay ne'er-do-weels, chirruped, reckless of coming winter, and across the road in the woods, a whip-poor-will complained to the stars. These two men and this woman talked of the great social problems which are pressing themselves upon us for solution—which must be solved, and solved soon if the Republic stands; which will be solved by the intelligence of the people of America, to the astonishment of older countries. It has solved other and apparently harder problems before. The farmer and his daughter listened to this man who had given his life to the study of the problem, the girl ardently, the old man acknowledging his ignorance; and the student, feeling that here was intelligence worthy his best endeavors, talked as few men are given the power to talk, even though, like him, they have the convincing element of truth on their side. To these two he gave a foretaste of the eloquence, the cutting sarcasm, the brilliant wit and quick powers of repartee, of which, at the time, the world knew little, but which it felt in after years, and by which it was swayed as genius always

sways the world. At times Britomart would feel the blood tingle to her fingers' ends, as the ring of his sharp, incisive arguments struck an answering chord of conviction in her own soul, and she would cry: "It is true, father, every word is true!" and the old man would respond, "You are right, Britomart, it is true, and I have been too busy, too hard driven, to take the time to study it out."

"This is as the demagogues would have it," responded Blair. "Every laboring man who comes to understand this question is a discord in their music, because their motto is the one Jay Gould made famous, 'Damn the people!' There is but one hope for us—in the voter. There is but one hope for the voter, and that hope is knowledge. To spread the gospel of Socialism is every man's first duty, for the sake of unborn generations. In order to understand it aright one must think and one must read. But the laboring man of today has no time—no inclination to do this. He will not read books, but he will read papers, light, catchy articles, which do not absorb too much of his time or thought. Unfortunately the great power of the press is arrayed on the other side. A man must be well up in the million mark before he can become a power in the newspaper world, and what cares a millionaire for the groans of the victims being slowly crushed between the upper and the nether millstone of monopoly and competition? He is safe, his bones do not crackle.

The working man will listen to that target of many curses, the agitator, as he harangues his audience on the street corner. He is apt to get a shower of stones or gutter slime of any sort for his pains, but if his heart is in the cause, he remembers that Christ, the Socialist without peer, the first, the best, the laborer who spoke for laborers, suffered the same indignities at the hands of stolidity and ignorance, yet with divine patience turned the other cheek, enduring even to death for the people whom he loved.

ⁿBut the labor-world will learn—has already learned much. You farmers, who feel the pressure in a less degree than the laborers in the city, because your children do not die before your eyes for want of food and God's sunlight, and because the echoes you get of the struggle are through the medium of a servile press—the vaunted free press of America—you are less teachable than they who suffer more. Injustice has come to you so gradually, so coyly, that you do not call it by its right name. You designate it as over-production in the west, or election year, or some other cause which gives you poor pay for your hard labor. You know times are hard and you are seeking a remedy. When the fall election comes men will mount the stump and promise remedies if you will only vote their way. This fall it will be the tariff. When the tariff is adjusted good times will come again. You say these men are great statesmen, that they have made a study of this matter—they

know. It must be the tariff, and so they deceive you and put you off for another term of years, and you fail to note that good times never come back in all their golden glory; a little brightening here and there, to be sure, a slight lifting of the cloud, only to settle deeper and blacker than before. You work, you sweat, you produce. One-half of your profit goes to the transportation company, the greater share of the rest to the gambler in wheat, and you—you are granted your sustenance; you are kindly allowed as are their horses, enough to keep you alive and strong to labor for them another year. Your last really good times, when you felt you had an adequate return for the labor you accomplished, have come and gone, until a change in the system is brought about, until the popular vote is educated above wasting its power in opposing parties divided on issues long dead, of no real account save as a war cry for the parties. For instance, your tariff issue this fall, a cloud in the sky upon which you are invited to fix your eyes while the vampire monopoly sucks your blood unheeded. Unless there are chosen ones to carry this message to the people most interested, unless there are brave men and women ready to sacrifice their lives in directing the labor forces aright, in securing harmony among those who already realize the urgency of the labor problem, in arousing the intelligent class, who do not as yet feel the hardest pressure, in changing public opinion and bringing it to bear

upon the evils of capitalism, unless there are those who are willing to do this, taking as their pay abuse, and realizing that they will not live to see the full fruitage of their life work, then must liberty become an empty word, and the sun of American greatness set in darkness as did those of Rome, Greece, and every country that has made Mammon god and sacrificed the masses to its idol."

William John was not usually present during the talks on the side steps. He was in the habit of spending his evenings with Tilly. Once Tilly had come to the Landors' to see Britomart, and although Britomart was kinder to her than usual, she found her listening to what she considered a foolish argument about nothing, very dry indeed, and did not come any more, preferring to have William John come to her home.

One evening Blair brought a violin with him, and instead of talking politics, they spent the evening listening to its music, Britomart accompanying on the piano. William John and his father sat on the stone platform in front of the parlor door. William John was charmed. He loved music, and his ear was fine enough to assure him that such music as this was not an every-day occurrence about Belleville. He did not, however, approve of the influence the stranger was obtaining over his sister, and it was by his advice that Mrs. Landor came home, detailing Britomart as supply in her place at Frank's.

Britomart was sullen when she learned of the arrangement. It would take her away from her beloved music. Her lessons had begun in good earnest. She would have no time for the books Blair gave her. Miller would begin haunting her again—he had been giving her a terrible lesson by totally ignoring her, and she had almost forgotten him; and, more than that, she was afraid of growing to love Frank's baby, and that she was bound not to do. And after all she was defeated in the very first encounter, for when Mary laid the little bundle in her arms, with an anxious though covert look of inquiry in regard to how Britomart would receive the baby, her mother-heart was not disappointed.

"You little rascal!" said Britomart, hugging him close, and kissing his funny, wrinkled little mouth, "you have no business here in this hard world, and I was mad enough when I knew you were coming, but now that you are here, we'll all turn in and make things as easy for you as possible, I suppose."

"Until you forget all about him in caring for your own," laughed Mary.

Then, standing there, tall and beautiful, with the child in her arms, its long white dress shining against her black one, Madonna-like in her seriousness, Britomart uttered a prophecy and a promise. "Mary, I shall never have a child of my own; but, please God, my arms shall reach wide enough to embrace, and my heart shall be large enough to love as many disinherited little

ones as one poor woman may reach, who, like Mr. Bumpy here, have been dispoiled of their rights before their birth."

"I don't know what you are talking about, Britomart, but I'm sure you will marry and have children of your own—little Millers."

There was an expression of disgust on Britomart's face.

"Well, then, some other name. I don't blame you for not liking that man. I can't bear him. I get so sick of his political clack in the store, but I can say if you never know how nice it is to have a home, even a poor little cramped one like this, behind a village store, and a husband and children, you have missed the sweetest thing in life."

"I don't doubt that, my dear," assented Britomart, still playing with Sir Bumpy's little hand and cuddling the downy cheek on her neck.

Frank came in and sat down to tea with a sigh.

"And I don't understand you when you say that Bumpy was disinherited before he was born. Poor child didn't have much of an inheritance, I'm sure—just the chance to earn his living by hard work, as his father and mother has."

"That is all he demands. He certainly has the right, being in the world through no fault of his own, to gain some of the good things of which this world is full, if he is willing to work for them, but in place of this he will, in all probability, be obliged to cringe and beg for the privilege of earning a bare subsistence."

"Oh, Britomart, don't talk that way; you frighten me," said Mary.

"How is it, Frank, are you earning more than enough to feed your flock comfortably?"

Frank's careworn face took on the look of despair his wife knew only too well of late.

"I have been looking over my books this afternoon, and I find I have made, as wages, outside of expenses and wholesale bills, just forty eight cents per day during the last year."

"Ah, then, you have been lazy and have not worked."

"Worked!" said Frank, and his voice trembled; "I have worked hard enough to have earned eighteen dollars per day; but as a man said in my store last night, the day of making a living at small store-keeping in country towns is over forever."

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Spence, who was staying with Mary for a couple of days, took the baby away from Britomart.

"Aunt Britomart shan't talk so about the little man. He's got as good a right to live as anybody, and he shan't be called Bumpy, for he has a pretty name. He is named Robert John, after his dear grandpa."

"Bumpy," laughed Frank; "it just suits him!"

"You've done it, Britomart Landor!" cried Mary. "I'll warrant that child will be Bumpy all his life!"

And he was. Even his grandma Spence, after a heroic struggle, adopted the nick name. As the child grew older the name proved appropriate. Many times a day Frank and Mary were called upon to examine the tow head, to see if the damage was beyond repair, and the saying, "Bumpy Landor is down again," came to be a familiar expression in the neighborhood.

Mrs. Spence was a sweet woman with snow white hair, and a worn, melancholy face—a face which must have had a dignified beauty in youth. It bore the print of disappointment and blighted hopes, and it was no wonder, for the woman had married a man far inferior in every respect, and though no one in the world knew it save herself, her life had been one long tragedy of crushed ideals and hard, uncongenial toil. Her

daughter Mary was the one bright spot in it, and she pitied a childless woman above any one else in the world. She could not understand that a woman's husband might be more to her than children, that a realized dream of ambition might fill a great heart quite as effectually as a family.

"There is another thing I am going to scold you about, Britomart," she said, with an affectionate smile at the girl.

"Go ahead, Mrs. Spence," answered Britomart; "your scoldings are like mother's. One can shed them as a duck sheds water."

"It is this: You must not talk to Frank as though he would never get along any better in his business. You must remember small beginnings make great endings. Other people have made comfortable little fortunes by keeping store in a country town, and what has been done in the past may be done again."

"But it can't," said Britomart. "It ought to be possible, but it is not, nor will it ever be."

"She is right, I believe," sighed Frank. "Those fortunes were made before such firms as Montgomery Ward and Co. of Chicago, and hundreds of others like them, came into existence. That was a good example this afternoon, when you were in the store. I tried to sell that Distan saw to a man and was about to close the bargain, when a neighbor of his came in and told him he could get it a quarter cheaper by sending to Montgomery Ward for it. I tried to wriggle

out of it, but there was no heart in my argument, because I knew the man told the truth. Montgomery Ward and Co. can sell that saw cheaper than I, the best I can do."

"You must be content with smaller profits, then," said Mrs. Spence.

"My dear woman, I have actually to pay the same price to the jobbers for that saw which Montgomery Ward charges the farmer for it."

"Then how is it?"

"Well, in the first place their trade is all cash—no bad debts to subtract from the profits; then they buy the Distan saw by the thousands; the manufacturers know on which side their bread is buttered and look out that they are not troubled by competition in prices among the smaller jobbers. It is not hardware alone; it is groceries, dry goods, everything. Mr. Smith told me yesterday he had put the last line of dress goods on his shelves that he will ever purchase, because there is positively no use. They lie there and go out of date, and have to be sold far below cost at last, while his customers go about with purses full of samples from Marshall Field, or big New York firms, from which they make their selections. The grocery men thought they were safe, because groceries were commodities which, when wanted, were wanted immediately and in small quantities, but they find they are not exempt. People buy sugar, tea, coffee, flour, and so forth, in bulk, getting a splendid reduction by so doing, while the cus-

tomers who are forced to our doors either buy on credit or call for some unusual article which might not be demanded of a village storekeeper once in ten years, and which, of course, we do not have in stock. Then the customer goes away grumbling that you can never get anything you want in a small town, while my staple goods grow musty in the barrels."

"Oh, Frank," cried Britomart, "my heart aches for you, not only as a brother but as a dealer, because I realize that you, and all of your class, will be crowded out of existence, and there is no help for you. It is best—it is the inevitable march of progress; but, oh! the process, the crowding, the crushing, the dying out of hope, the grasping at straws by the drowning! But it must come before we learn to turn our backs on the old system and preach the doctrine of Socialism."

"Britomart!" The exclamation came from Mrs. Spence. She had risen with the baby in her arms. Her wrinkled face, lovely yet beneath her white hair, was pale with emotion. "How dare you talk like that to your brother, a law-abiding, God-fearing citizen! If he has trials and business disappointments, it is no more than every young man has, and it is wicked to talk like that. God knows what is best for him, and if he remains an honest man will take care of him and his family. What did Brother Granby say in his sermon last Sunday morning? Obey God, and ask no questions."

"Oh, Mrs. Spence, if Brother Granby preached such a sermon I don't believe he found his text in the Bible. Ask no questions? We have been following that rule too long. We suffer but sigh piously and say it is God's will, when it is not God's will. It is the will of the gods of Ignorance and Cupidity. If it were God's will for us to ask no questions, why did He give us reasoning powers? Why did He plant an everlasting interrogation point in the heart of an ignorant country girl like myself, making me ask, ask, ask, although until of late I received no answer. I asked why my father toiled ever and always, only to near the end of life poorer than he began, on a glorious farm, raising good crops every year, yet burdened with a mortgage which covers it from line to line; why Mr. Spence was in the same predicament; why my brother Frank, industrious, honest, intelligent, cannot make both ends meet in a country store; why my brother Paul, who has spent his time learning a trade, is half the time out of work, until he is becoming a misanthrope, and in danger of going to the bad? I have asked these questions over and over with hate and rancor in my heart, and until within the last few days no one has answered. When I thought of our wrongs here, and read of those of the laborers in the great cities, beside which our own as yet are trivial, in my ignorance I was coming to believe with my brother Paul, that the human race was a mistake, and that God, like Nero,

was fond of seeing his people suffer. Why, Mrs. Spence, although I sat every Sunday under Brother Granby's teaching, I was getting to be the worst heathen in Green county. I could not assimilate his theories of God's eternal love, and the love of one Christian for another, because of that burning interrogation mark in my heart. Why, if God so loved the world, had He not given the poor a way out of their dilemma? Why were not all professed followers of the gentle Man of Sorrows eager to settle the great question, the awful question, of the rights of man to the means of existence? Why, and why, and why!—always the question, but never an answer, until the last few days; and then it was not Brother Granby who answered."

"Who was it, Britomart," asked Frank, "who answered your question so lately?"

"Dennis Blair, the Socialist."

"If you were my daughter, Britomart, I should see that Dennis Blair, the Socialist, or any other lawless tramp, should never again have a chance to addle your head with such wickedness! What has your father been about, I want to know, to let you fall into the company of such a person?"

Britomart came across the room and throwing herself upon the stool at Mrs. Spence's side, drew her unincumbered arm about her neck, saying with a laugh: "Play I am your daughter, Mrs. Spence. Say it is Mary who has uttered such awful words. If it were Mary you might disapprove, you might deplore the fact of her

turning Socialist; but you wouldn't stop loving her. That is all I ask."

Mrs. Spence did not remove her arm. "Well, if you were Mary, I should say you were out of your place in setting yourself up to know more than your parents. I should say you could expect nothing better than to be led astray and made a fool of if you would persist in meddling with things which are none of your business. Leave such matters to your father and brothers, child. A woman—a girl, has no business trying to understand them."

"And if I were Mary I should say: 'Mother, dear, every woman in the world, did she but understand the question, would be a Socialist. I would say men have suffered under the existing system, but their sufferings are not to be compared with those of women from the same cause. I should answer, under the reign of Socialism no woman would need sell her virtue for bread—not one!' How much prostitution would be done away with!"

"If you were Mary I should say, I do not like to hear such words on the lips of my daughter."

"And I would answer, 'Rather on the pure lips of your daughter, where they can harm no one, than in the hearts of thousands of poor girls on the streets of the cities, to whom there is no other answer to the riddle of life.' We have been fine too long; we have avoided the word, yet tolerated the deed, too ignorant and indolent to study out the remedy. We have

gone about sleepily instituting homes for the fallen, and letting the other sex deprive us of the power rightfully belonging to us at the ballot to exterminate sin."

"She is right, mother," broke in Frank. You say she might better have left it to her father and brothers to study out the question. I have been thinking on this subject a good deal of late, since this Dennis Blair has been in my store, but I acknowledge I have a thicker skull and a tougher heart than Britomart, here. Like a man, I must needs reason it out slowly, while Britomart, womanlike, reaches her conclusions by instinct and fits the reasons in afterwards. As for Blair, he seems a gentleman through and through. I don't think he is a man who would attempt to inculcate his ideas into the brains of young people surreptitiously or against their parents' consent."

"Parents' consent!" laughed Britomart. "Why, father is a stronger convert even than I. Ask him. I never talked a moment on the subject with Dennis Blair alone. Ask father, Frank. But what if I had? I am no fool, neither am I a child, that I cannot look the stern facts of the world in the face and judge for myself. I am twenty-three years old, and Tilly Leven considers me far gone in old-maidism; and I resent the insinuation that because I am a woman and unmarried, my judgment is inferior."

"I have seen this man Blair; he has been in my store a number of times. He has spoken of

the decay of the small industries, but never a word to lead me to think him a Socialist."

"I remember you told me about him," said Mary.

Later in the day, when the two young women were alone, or with no one in the room with them but Sir Bumpy, grunting and gurgling over a little red fist, which he seemed determined to devour, Mary confessed to Britomart that she believed she herself was more than half Socialist, but did not want her mother and father to know it, at least not until she could explain the meaning of the word, and the girls laughed together at the idea of being converted to something before you could give the definition of it.

"I don't know what Socialism is, Britomart, but I do know what poverty is, and I am afraid if this goes on much longer my acquaintance will be even closer. Frank is losing money every day, and, poor fellow, is so blue I am sorry for him. Now that mother is here, I want you to go into the store and help him if you will, and for goodness sake stay as long as you can; that's a good girl. It seems somehow as though you were going to help us out of the muddle we are in."

Accordingly Britomart went into the store, and patiently put up paper parcels containing sugar, calico, nails or honey. Every night a dozen men, more or less, gathered in the center of the store to discuss the coming election. Saturday night was always a noisy night. The fall

campaign was already casting its ominous shadow athwart the political horizon, albeit so early, and Henry Miller, backed by three or four strong republicans, upheld by the proprietor, his father and brother, made a stern fight against Old Man Spence, aided and abetted by Jake Flatterbush.

The Saturday on which Britomart assisted as clerk, this last named gentleman arrived first on the field of battle. He was a rough-looking individual of about forty, a bachelor, and a hard and bitter democrat. He had never acquired the accomplishment of writing, but he could spell out the local news in the Belleville "Weekly" with more or less proficiency. Old Man Spence was his oracle on all occasions, and the source of his political statistics. There were very few democrats in Belleville, it being a strong republican community.

Britomart was sorry to see Flatterbush coming in, because she knew Henry Miller would arrive soon, and she hated to witness the ordeal of bear-baiting which Miller loved to impose upon Jake. He took great delight in nagging Jake, and unless Old Man Spence was at hand Jake had no convincing arguments with which to do battle, save a ferocious glare, muttered oaths and personal abuse, that went far above Miller's head, and only served to enhance his glorious victory.

"Evening, Britomart. Who's buying salt? Is it you, Jake? What are you going to do with it;

make a brine to keep the democratic party from spoiling?"

Just then Old Man Spence came in from the living room behind, where he had been worshipping at the shrine of his grandson. He was Miller's sworn antagonist.

"What's the matter, Jake?" he asked, taking a fresh cheekful of plug tobacco, loading his heavy guns, so to speak, for the active engagement he saw just ahead.

"Oh, nothin' much, only our editor's got on one of his funny fits."

"Well, you mustn't say anything," responded Old Man Spence, with a wink and a backward movement of his thumb; "his girl's here."

"Yes, sir," continued Miller, feeling that he had said a good thing, "Jake's buying salt to preserve his party. He's afraid old Grover is going to spoil. I heard a fellow say yesterday that there wasn't but one thing in the world he wouldn't rather be than a democrat, and that was a dead man."

"Yes? Well, I don't think the democrats are all going to set down and cry on account of the loss of that kind of a man," responded Old Spence, firing a shot at the spittoon that hit the bull's eye at a distance of six feet, announcing with certainty that the battle was on.

"I told him he wouldn't find many of 'em in this town—only about ten of 'em, now that Bid Leeklaw has turned populist. Here's Bid now. Hello, Bid, just talking about you, Bid; just say-

in' you was the only populist in town, I guessed. Say, have to let your whiskers grow, won't you?"

Bid Leeklaw found a spare place against which to rest his shoulders, and responded that he didn't know it was necessary to let his whiskers grow to become a populist, but he was obliged to let his brains grow before he knew enough to be one.

"Yes, I'm the only populist in town," he finished; "but there's coming a day when there'll be more, there'll be more."

"I hope not, I hope not, Bid," said Miller, looking around for the laugh which he knew this sally would bring. There was quite an audience by this time. "I think one of your kind is a plenty for a small town like Belleville."

Miller was rewarded by the applause he had expected.

"That's right," responded Leeklaw; "I ain't much of a feller, I'll admit, "and he glanced down at a coat both ragged and dirty, and a pair of boots which were red and wrinkled by contact with the soil. "No, I'm a bad lot, me and my kind. What we need in town is a few more smart editors to show the folks which way to vote."

Nobody laughed at this except Jake Flatterbush, who had a tender feeling for his old colleague at times, although he considered that he had fallen from grace by going back on his party and turning populist.

"More smart editors, to tell us how to ward off hard times."

Old Mr. and Mrs. Leven came in, and Mrs. Leven proceeded to the back of the store to purchase groceries, while her husband joined the group about the spittoon in time to hear Miller's answer to Leeklaw's sarcasm.

"Hard times, hard times!" said Miller. "All you folks seem to know enough to do is to sound the calamity trumpet. What do you know about hard times, only so far as you are fated to be a living example of the warning that they that work not neither shall they eat?"

Leeklaw brought his hulking body to an upright position, and there was an ugly glitter in his eye.

"Don't you dare say I don't work, Henry Miller, whatever you say agin me; don't you dare say I don't work! I've always worked, and there was a time when I tried to save, but that's long ago. What's the use? You might as well get what there is out of it. A man who gits his livin' by days work now, might as well try to build a sand house in the river and expect it to last, as to accumulate enough to pay his funeral expenses. Now, I ain't got much pride myself, so I've come to the conclusion to git what I can out of life and not try for the funeral expenses, but let the town bury me."

"Which it would gladly do tomorrow," said Miller, and the store rang with protracted applause.

Mary came to the door at the back of the shop with the baby in her arms. "Do come inside awhile. Aren't you tired of the hubbub?"

Britomart had just finished with old Mrs. Leven, whose long, melancholy face, framed in a funereal bonnet, showed signs of patient fatigue, as she sat in the backless chair Britomart had placed for her, which she knew from experience she would be obliged to occupy until such time as the political storm subsided, and her husband felt that his voice could be spared.

"No," answered Britomart, "I'm not tired."

"Your looks belie you, then," said Mary, scanning with a loving eye her sister-in-law's flushed face and trembling hands.

"I'm not tired, Mary; but I'm excited and disgusted. Just look at them, all talking politics, each pulling on a separate string, which some different party has put in his hands, all pulling against each other, while their common enemy, private capital, sits high and invisible and preys upon them at its will; they, poor fools, never knowing what is pinching them. Here comes another with his own separate string, just as blind as the rest, and much more conceited."

"Why, Britomart Landor! How can you talk so about the minister!" and Mary disappeared laughing, leaving Britomart to wait upon Brother Granby, who advanced with a self-conscious swing born of absolute knowledge of his own worth in the world, and the unimpeachable correctness of his convictions.

"Good evening, Sister Landor. Are you well? Ah, I did not see you out last Sunday, and I supposed you were ill. Quite a political discussion they are having. All Greek to a lady, I presume, and quite right, quite right that it should be. Politics is a miry, murky cesspool, happily out of woman's jurisdiction."

Britomart's cheeks were burning and her eyes were flashing. Her voice, clear and ringing, possessed the quality of penetration, a quality Britomart would have been willing to dispense with in those days. Afterward—however, that doesn't enter the story here.

The storm about the stove had reached its climax. Old Man Spence, between spurts of tobacco juice and profanity, had declared that unless the tariff was reduced to allow the laboring man to live without paying the indirect tax, the country was ruined. Miller said the country was being ruined by a lot of hair-brained people who didn't and wouldn't vote the good old republican ticket, who were fighting the party which had saved them in the late rebellion, and for thirty years had brought good times and prosperity.

"And they ought to be prohibited by law!" shrieked old Leven, his long fiddle face pale with excitement. "They ought to be imprisoned for doin' of it, ruinin' of us all!"

"Ruin?" asked Bid Leeklaw; "you ain't ruined, are you? Thought you and Miller said

times wasn't hard, that everybody had a plenty, 'cept them as was too lazy to work."

"Times is hard, and we ain't got a plenty, and it's all along a you miserable democrats and populists, and up here by our house there's an arnichist come to live—right up by our house! Is it any wonder times is hard when such folks is allowed outside o' state's prison?"

"So you think everybody but republicans ought to be jailed, do you, and then times would be easy?"

"Yes, I do; ther a ruinin' of the country."

"Leven, you are too big a fool for me, even me, Bid Leeklaw, to talk to."

"By George! He's about right about the cranks heeling around through the country. I believe, myself, there should be a stop put to it," said Miller. And then the discussion got into the form it inevitably assumes at such meetings, of, "See here, my friend, let me ask you"; "Wait a minute, wait a minute"; "What about seventy-three!" "It's a lie, I say"; "What did Grover Cleveland do?" "Any one who makes such an assertion is a darn fool!"—when Britomart's clear, cutting tones came sifting through, as she talked politics to the minister, and gradually, without the knowledge or consent of the company, dominated the controversy.

"I suppose you give me credit for possessing common sense, Mr. Granby. I need not be blind nor deaf to my surroundings because I am a woman. I am interested in politics, as I

believe it my duty to be, and I am trying to understand its complexities, the whys and wherefores of today. I do not think that politics must always be discussed with profanity and personal abuse. Contrary to your supposition, I do know what the tariff is, and have a very decided opinion in regard to it. I should insist upon knowing what authorities they had been studying before I should be willing to admit the superior knowledge on the subject of any of these men who are talking so loudly and knowingly about it here. At the same time, I feel myself too ignorant as yet to be convinced that I am absolutely right and everybody who differs with me entirely wrong. However, as you broached the subject, I wanted to own that I had opinions, am trying to understand for myself, and am not ashamed of it."

Britomart suddenly discovered that she was the only person in the room who was talking. For a moment she was abashed, but her blood was fired by her evening of repression, and the conversation with Brother Granby had opened the floodgates of her eloquence, and she stepped from behind her brother's counter to deliver a lecture so sharp, so vivid, with such quick turns of sarcasm, that her hearers of all parties were bewildered and astonished—a lecture that not one of the men present would have dared deliver before the others for fear of being pitched headlong into the street.

"The republican party," she said, addressing

Miller as its most able representative; "what is it? A corpse, dead twenty years, yet you carry it about on your shoulders to impose its old shape, its old name, on confiding farmers and laborers, who blindly follow the pale deception as a dog follows its dead master; and under its familiar habiliments, where the sound life, the honest life of a party fighting against a wrong once pulsated, hides the false life of the snake, private interest—monopoly—money, money! How long will intelligent men like my father and my brothers here worship this slimy monster, who hides beneath the cloak of their old party, before they realize their mistake? Are we not the people, and are we not poor? Are we not our own masters, having the ballot, yet are we not tasting the very dregs of slavery? Who in this room dares to say we are not poor; Bid Leeklaw was right when he said it was coming—it has come, to a time when the most a laboring man can hope for in this world is to squeeze through with the meager necessities of life, and perhaps enough to bury them in the end—perhaps not enough for this. Bid Leeklaw has given up that hope; so have many, and with the hope all care whether they are buried respectably or not, and back of that all care as to whether there is anything about them respectable; and this is a land of plenty, of multimillionaires! Who dares to say millionaires are blessings?" (Henry Miller had made the assertion a few

minutes before, had argued their existence was a sign of prosperity in the land.) "If every millionaire had his desserts, his ground would be fenced about with the skulls of the starved whose portions he has usurped; not but that you or I, or Jake Flatterbush, would do the same thing if we had the power—that doesn't make it any better. You say, beware of meddling with the Constitution. Are we living up to the Constitution? Is this a government of the people, for the people? Isn't it rather a government of your millionaires, by monopolists for private gain? And you are too blind to see it! You—democrats, republicans, populists, prohibitionists—pulling each your own string, set on by the demagogues who head your several parties, and who are either blind themselves or do not wish you to see what it is which is pressing the life out of you; and ignorance cries out against reformers, against men who have studied and weighed and faced the difficulties, who have the temerity to stand up, announce their discoveries, demand the remedies, and take the consequences. Shall we Americans establish the fact of our incompetency, our inherent serfdom, by toiling on for generations under the heel of the oppressor, cringing and suffering until the state of desperation is reached, until the process of subjection has reached its climax, as in the older countries, before we begin to think for ourselves—to act for ourselves? Before many years it may be too late. Already it is whis-

pered that only property-holders have any right to vote. Then, Bid Leeklaw, where is your chance? Jake Flatterbush, where is your chance? Frank Landor, where is yours, or your son's? In the face of such facts the birth of a child in a poor man's family, instead of being an occasion for rejoicing, should be one of sorrow and lamentation, that another toiler is added to the mass in this land of slaves."

The force of the girl's passionate words, the unexpectedness of the harangue, had held the listeners as more logical or connected arguments could not have done. The lights burned dimly through the haze of tobacco smoke, which hung about the ceiling. Henry Miller and Old Spence, republican and democrat alike, stood aghast at this avalanche of heterodoxy and its source. Brother Granby, with his odorous pound of coffee poised on his arm, stood like a statue of Justice, stern and forbidding. Bid Leeklaw and Jake Flatterbush had forgotten even to smoke in their interest and astonishment. Old Leven's jaw refused to do its office, and hung flaccidly ajar on his grizzled whiskers, lengthening his dull, fiddle-shaped face absurdly, while his wife had risen in horror. Among a group of newcomers Britomart saw the faces of her father and William John, and behind them she suddenly became aware of a pair of narrow eyes fixed on her intently, while a smile of satisfaction played over the thin lips of Dennis Blair, as he took in the scene before him.

CHAPTER V.

As Britomart paused Bid Leeklaw removed his hat with a politeness which no one had ever known him to be guilty of before.

"You've told us just exactly the fix we're in, Miss Britomart; now tell us how to get out of it."

Britomart sighed. "I am but an ignorant country girl, who has only of late tried to inform herself. I am not competent as yet to tell you that, but ask this gentleman to tell you," and she indicated Blair, whom, until then, none of the group had noticed, as he stood quietly near the door. "He knows by bitter experience the working of the system in a great city, where the grind comes harder than upon us here. Ask him; he can tell you better than I can."

"Excuse me, Miss Landor," said Leeklaw, "but I want to say right here, that little speech of yours has warmed my heart, nevertheless," and he bowed gallantly, his hat still in his hand.

Before Blair could reply or advance, Henry Miller stepped in front of him and shook his fist in his face, his own face white with anger.

"This is your doings, damn you!" he ejaculated. "You come into the country, you free-luncher, to lead women astray!"

The smile never left Blair's lips, nor did he flinch in the slightest degree. On the other

hand, he made no aggressive movement. Had he attempted to chastise every man whose fists were thrust into his face, and who called him a liar, hypocrite and thief, his life might as well have been spent in the prize ring. But Miller's arm was hit by a blow from a sturdy hand which nearly dislocated his elbow, and John Landor's voice advised him to keep his fists out of the faces of gentlemen.

"John—Mr. Landor," stammered Miller, abashed by this attack from Britomart's father; "do you mean to uphold this—this——"

"What's the man done, I want to know, that he shouldn't speak? What's he done, I want to enquire? Come, out with it."

"Come outside and I'll talk to you. I can't in here."

"Yes, you can. There's nothin' you can't say right here—right here before everybody; in fact, you've said enough to make it pretty nearly necessary for the matter to be finished up right here and now!"

Miller began to feel that he had put his foot in it, but his anger was still high. All at once he felt he no longer had any backing. A few minutes ago, when he began his attack on Jake Flatterbush, he had the support of the Landors, Old Leven, and the other republicans who were in the store. Now that the war was against Britomart, he realized that his constituents had deserted him.

"Do you like to see a woman make a fool of

herself talking politics? That's what Britomart's been doing here tonight—talking of something she knows nothing about and has no business to know anything about, and he"—indicating Blair—"he has put her up to it, and I know it!"

"It's a lie!" shouted Bid Leeklaw. "She shows by what she has just said she knows more about it, a darn sight, than you do, you little sniveling one-horse-paper man!"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! Brother Landor, this is terrible; this is terrible!" It was the statue of Justice come to life, with the pound of coffee still balancing on its arm. "In the first place, I suggest that it would be more seemly if Sister Landor would retire, as these men seem to be more or less heated with political argument, and——"

"I don't know why Britomart isn't perfectly safe in her brother's store, with her whole family to back her, say nothing of her friends," and Frank Landor gave Miller a glance which sent a chill down that young man's back. Miller did not wish to get on bad terms with the Landors, because he had firmly decided to make Britomart Landor his wife; but when people meddled with his politics it touched him nearest his heart.

Old Mrs. Leven sat grasping her packages, winking her watery blue eyes, and sincerely hoping no one was going to fight.

"I guess Britomart's all right," said William

John, and his sister shot him a grateful glance, and a lump rose in her throat at the thought of the loyalty of dear old William John to a sister of whose course, she knew well enough, he did not approve.

"No, you needn't worry yourself about Miss Landor, parson," said Jake Flatterbush. "If anybody says even a cuss-word, I'll fire him myself. This ain't no barroom. I want to hear what the arnichist has to say. You can lay that coffee down a spell; ain't anybody goin' to steal it."

"I don't think you need call on Jake Flatterbush to protect you while I am here," blustered Miller, "but——"

"That's all right, gentlemen; give the lady and the clergyman chairs, and let's talk this matter over calmly a minute, will you?" asked Dennis Blair, advancing to the center of the group. "Let us reason together. There is nothing to be won by heated argument, but there may be by a quiet, friendly talk."

Leeklaw immediately set out one chair, and Frank provided another. Britomart sat down by Brother Granby, who either doubted the sincerity of Flatterbush's assurance in regard to the coffee, or in fear of a lapse of memory, held it tightly in his arms, together with the latest issue of the Belleville "Weekly," which he had received at the postoffice.

"Now, if anybody has anything to ask," suggested Blair.

"In the first place, then," said Old Spence, in a tone of great irritation, "what business you got stuffing this girl's head with such nonsense, as she's just been talkin'?" He was very much put out. On his entrance from the back of the store that evening he had been full of pleasant sensations. He had just been admiring his very admirable young grandson, and when his eye lit on Jake Flatterbush, Bid Leeklaw and Henry Miller, he anticipated a long evening of the usual flow of argument, which never got anywhere, didn't mean anything, and hurt no one; but this girl had broken up the meeting and knocked all the comfort out of it, by actually introducing new ideas. There was no use of new ideas. He didn't approve of them. The old ones were just as good as they had been for years.

"I want to tell you, Mr. Spence, that Mr. Blair did not put this nonsense, as you call it, into my head. I have eyes to see, haven't I? And I know that I and my people have worked hard all our lives, yet grown poorer all the time. It doesn't take a very brilliant intellect to figure out that fact. Mr. Leven has acknowledged the same fact two or three times this evening, as well as Jake Flatterbush and Bid Leeklaw. My brother Frank made the same assertion before supper—good republican as he is; he said it was hard times. Now, I have asked a dozen different men who should know what makes it hard times with us, when there has been no drouth, no storms to spoil crops, and when we are all

able to work. One man told me it was because tariff was too high, and the people paid too heavily for the necessities of life; another said it was too low and everybody was competing with the pauper labor of Europe—that Europe was importing both wool and wheat into this country. I found out this was an untruth, or a mistake, and lost confidence in this man's story. Another teacher explained to me that there was an over-production—more than the people could use; the very next one informed me it was over-population. You can readily see that by putting these two bits of information together, I arrive at just nothing at all. Brother Granby, here, declares it is intemperance and prodigality—a general lack of religion throughout the country. Mind you, all this was buzzing in my head before I ever saw Mr. Blair, and the reason was that my father's farm was mortgaged heavily, and I saw my mother and brothers bowing under a burden of work which seemed pressing harder on them every year, and my woman's heart cried out for the reason—the reason for this injustice! Right here comes Dennis Blair (to my father, not to me) with the first truly sensible reason for it all, a reason which is the first given me able to bear its own weight, a comprehensive reason, embracing and giving a reason for all these other reasons, which have been so palpably inadequate. It seems to me as though any one with the power to think for themselves must believe as he does—as I do

now, that a socialistic form of government, and that in the near future, is the only hope of our democratic country; that the power of money must be abolished, that our Constitution, which has become a dead letter as it reads today, must be changed, modified to meet the new demands of new conditions; that in order to be in the spirit as well as the letter a government of the people, this social change must be made."

"Britomart Landor, do you know you are talking anarchy?" cried Miller.

"I beg your pardon," said Blair, "anarchy means the doing away with government. Mr. Miller, the gospel Miss Landor is preaching does not advocate such a measure. It leans in the opposite direction. In place of doing away with government, it enhances the powers of government a hundredfold."

"Why," said Brother Granby, shifting his coffee, the more readily to use his right arm for gesticulating, "our government is dangerously corrupt now. What would it be if it had all this added power; the railroads, for instance, the jurisdiction over the land, the mines——"

"Would you not rather be answerable to a democratic government of which you, as a voter, were a part, than a serf on the estate of a Russian gentleman? You certainly would. Who owns us now? According to Poor's Manual of Railroads for 1885, the share capital of the railroad companies amounts to \$3,762,616,686, and the funded debt to \$3,669,115,772, making a total

of \$7,431,732,458. According to the census of 1880 the estimated valuation of the farms in the United States is \$10,197,000,000. And this railroad wealth is practically in the hands of less than a dozen men. Whither are we drifting? who owns us?"

Old Man Spence, Leven, and Miller, all began talking at once.

"One at a time, gentlemen, one at a time," cried Leeklaw. "We've got all night now. Frank won't have any more custom."

"I think it is high time we was goin' home," said Old Mrs. Leven, weakly, rising to her feet.

"Set down!" commanded her husband, and the poor tired old woman subsided, sighing heavily. Mary stepped around the corner of the counter and drew her into the sitting-room, where she reclined in a rocking-chair and asked stereotyped questions about the baby, which Mary patiently answered, although her ears were strained to catch the arguments which floated in through the open door. She heard her father declaring that there always had been labor cranks, and Freelove cranks, and temperance cranks, and always would be, interlarding his declarations with expectorative pauses, and strengthening them with his favorite oaths. They'd been at it in the old countries for five hundred years, and what had come of it?

"Yes, indeed; yes, indeed," assented Brother Granby. "Think of the terrible French Revolution!" He shifted his package with a deep

sigh, and the aroma of coffee floated out with a soothing effect.

"That's what always discourages me," ventured William John; "it's all been talked of so long and nothing come of it."

"We cannot 'unlock the future's portal with the past's blood-rusted key,'" answered Blair. "Remember the condition of the French peasant; remember his ignorance, his helplessness. For him there was no other way; for us, with our universal education, the power which we wield through the medium of the ballot, there is but one thing we lack—unanimity. There are so many agents to lead us astray. We are incited to petty political strifes. When King Capital sees the people growing uneasy he manages to draw their attention to a presidential campaign, and sets you republicans off in one direction, following a flag bearing the legend, 'Down with free trade; let the poor man live,' while the democrats are following a similar banner on which is written, 'Down with the thief High Tariff; let the poor man live!' Meanwhile King Capital, with his tenacious fingers about your throats, strangles you gently, each partisan laying his conscious shortness of breath at the door of the opposite party."

"Oh, see here, now," broke in Miller, "I can't stand this! I——"

"Shut up!" cried Leeklaw. Not a word out o' you, Miller. You can spout it next week in

the Belleville 'Weekly,' but you ain't got the floor tonight; we've heard you before."

Flatterbush felt it was as good a chance as might ever come to him to get even with Miller.

"You might as well call his mother a mouse as to say anything to Miller against the republican party. It's the only thing he knows anything about, and he don't know but darned little about that."

Everybody laughed, and Miller said something Mary could not hear, because old Mrs. Leven was droning along about "when Tilly was teething." Everything which could happen to a child had happened to Tilly while teething. Mary's mother came into the room and Mary escaped into the store, bearing with her a chair, which she planted beside Britomart, and took possession of Britomart's hand, which instinctively sought her sister-in-law's, and the two women smiled into each other's faces. It seemed to Mary that somehow Britomart was carrying on an unequal warfare, and needed the help of another woman; and although until the last week she had never heard the word Socialism, her soul was afire with this new wine of logic, which this cool, unimpassioned man—this Blair, was poruing into the ears of his hearers, willing and unwilling. She looked about upon the faces, all turned towards him who was speaking; her father's, quivering with indignation at innovations he was too obstinate to admit were right; old Leven's stolid, blank, uncomprehending;

Flatterbush's and Leeklaw's, marked by dissipation; Henry Miller's, puffing with suppressed anger and disturbed egotism; and she gasped, "O God! must the future of my boy and his children depend upon the action of such as these!" But, back in the shadow, were the weather-beaten, intelligent faces of Farmer Landor and William John; and near her own was Britomart's, with the red flush of courage and high resolve mantling the cheek and flashing in the eyes, while there, in the center of the group, passionless, persistent, patient, was Dennis Blair, calmly battering at the thick wall of prejudice and bigotry, with truths, truths, truths. When one failed of its purpose and fell, he caught it, turned it about, insisted on its consideration, reiterated its importance, until at last he felt it had entered one or another of the minds about him. And this had been the life of Dennis Blair for years; and this, he firmly believed, should always be his life, preaching the gospel of Socialism without hope of seeing any of the fruits of his work, but knowing there would be fruits just the same; talking, writing, reviled, mocked, jeered at—but, after all, was he not following in the footsteps of a Master? Christ walked the earth preaching "Peace on earth, good will to men," and Dennis Blair the Socialist was his true disciple; not the Catholic zealot, bearing aloft the cross and pursuing the Protestants with undying hate; not the Protestants, burning and murdering the Catholics in the name of the

gentle Christ; not the women, bowing above their prayer books, with their hearts full of pride and frivolity; not the fat pastors, preaching hollow-sounding words from marble hearts to deaf, self-satisfied ears; but Dennis Blair the Socialist, gladly giving life and strength to bring about Christ's purpose literally, "Peace on earth, good will to men." Mary felt a great tide of love rise up in her heart for this man, and an impulse to bring Bumpy and lay him in Blair's arms and say, "Fight for his future, save him. In you and your fellow-workers lies this baby's hope, and the hope of coming generations."

"It's time we was a-goin' home." The persistent voice of Mrs. Leven, and the appearance of her hatchet face at the back door, broke the spell, and old Leven, who had been nodding for the last ten minutes, acquiesced and led the way to the door.

"And you say the land should belong to the government, and the railroads, and the factories, and the mines?" questioned Bid Leeklaw.

"I do," answered Blair.

"Do you believe this, John Landor?"

"I do," answered the farmer.

"And you, Britomart?"

"Most assuredly."

"And you, William John, and Frank?"

Frank hesitated a moment, and then said slowly: "At the supper table tonight I should not have answered that question in the affirma-

tive. But I know something is wrong, and this new system promises a way out."

"William John?" persisted the questioner.

Old Leven, arrested by the question, turned at the door, and held a wavering forefinger towards the youth.

"William John Landor, if you dare say you believe what that arnichist says, you need never darken my doors again. I ruther my daughter was dead and buried and the green grass growin' over her than that she should marry an arnichist or a democrat. Do you believe it?"

William John's face was fiery red.

"Auh, shet up, and go along home; your woman's a yellin' at ye," exclaimed Jake Flatterbush, pushing old Leven out of the door, and thus saving poor William John from deciding between his sweetheart and the right to think for himself.

The Sunday morning following the discussion in the store Brother Granby felt it his duty to preach a sermon on the subject of patience and meekness, each bearing his burden in this world uncomplainingly, and especially not to meddle with that which was none of his business. He felt his eloquence expand as he looked down into the clear, defiant eyes of Britomart Landor, seated with her brothers and parents in the family pew. He asserted, solemnly, that the trouble of the times came largely from discontent among laboring people; that discontent was sin. He spoke very plainly on the subject of

women being contented in their sphere, letting the strifes and arguments of the world go by unheeded, while they occupied themselves with the calm and rational pursuits for which the Lord had evidently intended them. He even ventured to assume a little of the Lord's authority, and declared that those who refused to fill this especial walk in life would be more or less damned. When he settled back on the haircloth chair, and wiped his perspiring face, after the sermon, he devoutly hoped it had reached the heart of that obstinate Landor girl, and might do her good.

It did not make much of an impression on her, however; but old Mrs. Leven, her shawl drawn tightly across her bent shoulders, her watery eyes blinking weakly in the strong August sunshine, felt a wave of thankfulness that she had lived a life acceptable alike to God and man, that she had perverted neither her own nor her child's life by undue knowledge on any subject, and that she and Tilly were especially ignorant and innocent in regard to politics. She shuddered despite the warmth of the day, when she thought of the awful depths of sin into which her neighbor Landor had allowed his daughter to fall. She hoped Tilly would obey her father's commands and give up William John Landor; but Tilly, like most pillowy young women of her caliber, possessed a stubbornness in certain matters which was almost masculine in its intensity.

After service was over, Britomart stood talk-

ing with her mother in the long grass, while William John and her father went to untie the team. It was very warm. The ragged plum trees which grew between the church and the cemetery threw sharp black shadows on the grass. A hot harvest smell came up from the adjacent fields. The people thronged out of the little shabby church and went their several ways; numerous old and middle-aged women, looking warm and tired, and dreading the getting of dinner, which was the next number on their programme; many young girls tricked out in pink, white and green, wearing tawdry hats loaded with cheap artificial flowers; a few old men and very young boys; and three young men, the target for many inviting pairs of eyes.

Britomart held her white skirts from contact with the grass as she talked with her mother. To Mrs. Landor's eyes Britomart looked fit to be a queen, so tall, so graceful, with her round waist and dark crown of hair. And Mrs. Landor was right in regard to her daughter's beauty, despite the opinions of Belleville.

"Pa says you had quite a brush with a whole store-full of folks last night," Mrs. Landor said, smiling up into Britomart's face.

"Yes," answered Britomart, absently. She saw Henry Miller loitering by the steps, and she knew he meant to walk home with her. She felt very much averse to his society.

"Come home as soon as Frank's folks can spare you," called her mother, as they drove out

of the yard, leaving Britomart looking wistfully after them. She longed to be in the wagon going home. She wanted to tell her mother her troubles. She hated the town of Belleville, Frank's store, everybody in general, and in particular the man who stood switching at the may-weeds with his umbrella, and waiting, very impatiently, by the steps for her.

She said good morning in a somewhat distant manner, to which he responded with a grunt. They walked on in silence a few minutes. Miller was very angry with this headstrong young woman; and never dreaming but that he possessed the winning card, he determined to discipline her a bit. They had reached Main street before he spoke again. He had expected some sort of an apology from Britomart, and intended to make her pay dearly for her temerity on Saturday night. Main street was no place for a lover's quarrel to be successfully carried on. Britomart might—was very likely—to show a good deal of emotion at what he had determined to say to her. He didn't care to have her crying along the street, and the fellows all guying him next day.

"Let's walk down by the river a few minutes," he suggested.

"I can't; I must help Mary get dinner."

"But I have something of importance to say to you."

"Can't you say it here?"

Miller flung his head angrily. "Yes, I suppose

I can. I ain't much of a hand to have spats in public places, though."

"I'm not much of a hand to have 'spats' anywhere," retorted Britomart, coolly.

"I think you are," blustered Miller; "at least, you seem to take delight in making me mad!"

"I never thought of such a thing," declared Britomart. "If you mean what I said and did Saturday night, I can tell you it was not on your account. I only spoke my convictions."

"Your convictions!" sneered Miller. "You will learn some day, Miss Landor, that a woman hasn't much use for convictions. The fewer she has, the better care she takes of a man's home and babies; and that's what he marries her for."

"Really, Mr. Miller? This is news to me. Have you anything further to say to me? If not, you will excuse me; I have work to do."

"Oh, come, Britomart, don't get on your high horse. You made me mad, and I've made you mad, so now we're quits. I'm willing to take everything back—till the next time; but I'm in dead earnest when I say I won't stand this sort of thing from any girl. I don't believe in girls making strong-minded shows of themselves, and any girl I go with must cut that; that's all there is about it; and you had no business to come out and talk politics as you did Saturday night. But let's not spoil the whole Sunday scrapping. Tell you what I'll do: After dinner I'll come round with one of Bagly's teams and we'll take a ride."

"I don't care to go," said Britomart. They were on the stoop at the little side entrance which led into Frank Landor's living-rooms at the rear of the store. Miller seized her hand and pulled her down beside him on the steps, retaining the hand, although in plain sight of the street.

"Come," he said, "you and I can't afford to fight so much. One or the other of us has got to give up our opinion if we are going through life together."

It was the declaration which Britomart had been dreading. She had intended when he asked her to marry him to say yes. Everybody decided it would be for the best, and she knew no especial reason why it would not. Girls had to marry.

"Aren't we going through life together?" he persisted, still holding her hand.

"I think not,—now," she answered. He was astonished into silence. Old Farmer Landor's daughter was refusing him; or, hold!—impossible! She was angry with him and was dissembling to make him uneasy. He would show her that there was too much disparity in their positions to allow of this by-play.

"Oh," he said, releasing her hand, "then I understand that you don't care for my company any more?"

"I do not."

"Very well, Miss Landor, I bid you good afternoon."

She stood still in the sun, watching him go down the street, with a great feeling of relief in her heart. She did not until that moment realize how she had come to hate him.

"And had things happened a little differently, I should have married him," she said, with a shudder; "and then I should have come, some day, to feel like this towards him, and yet have been tied to him for life." He, swinging airily down the street, saw from the corner of his eye her white drapery, and knew she stood on the steps watching him; longing, probably, to call him back, yet not daring to do so, ready to go and cry her eyes out all the afternoon. Well, he would give her something substantial to cry for. He could bring the thumb-screw of jealousy to bear upon the young lady in a way not open to girls on the spur of the moment.

An hour later he drove slowly by the Landor store in company with a very pink-and-white young lady, her childish face upturned to his, full of bubbling laughter incited by his wit; her white-gloved hands crossed in her lap, and the dry August wind tossing a couple of heavy, creamy plumes about her head. Britomart saw them from the window and bowed smilingly, then fell into deep thought for a while.

"What's the matter, Britomart?" asked Frank, fearfully. "You don't care, do you, because that puppy—"

"No," answered Britomart, "because I do not love him; but suppose I did?"

CHAPTER VI.

Britomart stayed a week after this, dealing out brown paper parcels to country folks, giving sampies to Belleville ladies, tending Sir Bumpy, who was beginning to realize that he was a human being and to assume airs in consequence, washing dishes for Mary, and talking politics with Frank, Mrs. Spence, and Bid Leeklaw at odd times.

To Leeklaw this girl was a revelation. He took to haunting the store at all hours, and the moment Britomart was at leisure, sidling up to her and opening a conversation on social topics. The man was like a schoolboy who is being pinched and hectored by some one who sits behind, or in front, or at his side, but he cannot locate the mischief-maker. He bubbles with vengeance, but every face looks so innocent he knows not where to lay the blame, and the teacher assures him that he is mistaken. He is not being pinched, or if he is, it is a visitation of God, sent for his good, and as a discipline.

Now this friendly girl leans forward and kindly tells him who the culprit is. She says, and in a way which brings absolute conviction, "It is not Johnnie Hightariff, at your right, though he is not altogether a virtuous boy; it is not Mike Overproduction, nor James Overpopulation; it is that fiend incarnate, Judas Private-Capital, whose middle name is Monopoly! He is the

boy who is causing your suffering. Do not strike out blindly, hitting innocent ones, and spoiling your chance for revenge. Be sure you are right, then, as far as lies in your power, punish. . You can do much by warning other scholars. When they all come to know this boy in his true character, he will be thrown out of school, but he is a fawning sneak, who pinches, and lays it at other people's doors."

Britomart lent her admirer books, reading certain passages aloud to him, that he might understand them better, and she smiled when she received them back to notice the visible signs of the struggle to master their contents, in the greasy thumb-marks. At certain places the letters were hardly discernible, owing to some especially knotty page, which had required many perusals. The books belonged to Dennis Blair, but he was only too glad to see the marks of a laborer's hands upon them. Not once during the week did Henry Miller visit the Landor store, but Britomart saw him on two occasions riding by with the girl of the creamy plumes. He meant to give Britomart a terrible lesson.

Friday night William John came for her with the team and she went home. She was very glad to be at home again. It was so sweet and cozy. The fire shone bright in the kitchen stove and looked comfortable, despite the fact that it was August. Her mother bustled about getting supper, while her father and William John did the milking.

Britomart sat down on the front porch after tea was ready and watched the sun go down over the western grove. She saw Blair coming down the hill, his hands in his pockets. He seemed to be absorbed in thought. Suddenly he stopped to observe something by the roadside, then Britomart saw him beating the ground with a stick, and, stooping, pick up an object which he carried on the palm of his hand. Britomart's mother came to the doorstep and sat down beside her.

"Do you like him as a boarder, mother?"

"Yes, he never has a word to say; eats anything you put before him. He and your father have great times, talking this new doctrine, you know—this Socialism."

"And what do you think of it?"

"Oh, I don't know—if what he says is true——"

"We don't have to believe what he says, mother; we can see for ourselves."

"I don't mind you and your father falling in love with Socialism; but, Britomart, I don't want you to fall in love with the Socialist, because I want you to marry Henry Miller, and live right here in Belleville."

Britomart laughed.

"What put such a foolish idea into your head, mother?"

"It's what folks are saying," answered Mrs. Landor, solemnly. "Tilly Leven heard it and told me the other day. They say that you are

infatuated with this stranger, that you have been preaching his doctrines in Frank's store, and that you have used Henry Miller shamefully."

"Henry Miller and I have broken off for good," said Britomart.

Mrs. Landor made a despairing little ejaculation.

"Then it is true!" she cried, and grasped Britomart's hand with her own, which trembled.

Britomart was silent for a moment. She was trying to analyze her own feelings. She knew that her ideas in regard to marriage with Henry Miller had undergone a change since her acquaintance with this man Blair, and she meant to know positively if the reasons which the neighbors assigned for this change were the right ones. Was it a love for Blair which had wrought this change? If so, she should not hesitate to tell her mother. She always made a confidant of her mother, because she knew her faith was not misplaced; that no matter how much of a temptation it might be to tell a daughter's hopes and triumphs to a group of quilters, or afternoon visitors, boasting of their own daughters, her mother never succumbed to it.

"Why don't you answer me?" her mother asked, nervously. "You would be a good sight better off to marry a Belleville business man, who is settled in one place, and that place near home, than to go traipsing around the country

with this stranger. Britomart, who knows what his father is, or was—or his mother!”

Blair came up the walk before Britomart could answer her mother. He held out a slender white hand, in the palm of which crouched a wounded toad.

There was something peculiar about Blair's hands; they were so shapely, so slender, yet possessed of such steely strength of wrist and fingers, acquired, perhaps, in playing the violin, of which he was a master. Britomart loved to watch the ease and strength with which those white fingers found their places on the strings of the violin or upon the piano keys.

“I found him in the teeth of his enemy,” he said, smiling at the two women in the door; “and if you do not object, Mrs. Landor, I will put him in the garden to recover his wounds. Poor little fellow! There is something awful to me in the slow destruction of a snake's victim; it is so much worse than the quick spring of the animal which kills and devours afterwards. It reminds me of—I will not preach, however. Miss Britomart, you know of what it reminds me,” and he went round the house in the direction of the garden, laughing.

The elder woman had not returned his pleasant greeting with much warmth. She felt a sudden dislike for her boarder, with his beautiful hands and strong, compelling face.

“He is a man who can make people think as he

does whether they want to or not," she said aloud.

"Yes," Britomart answered, thoughtfully, "I believe he is, and I am very glad of it, because the world needs to think as he does. I believe in the doctrine he preaches. I long to read the book he is writing. I believe it will be a book of fate for a generation yet unborn. But, mother, don't worry about my being in love with the man. There isn't the slightest danger. I am in love with his ideals, with his work, but not with Dennis Blair."

A look of relief came over Mrs. Landor's face. She did not for a moment doubt Britomart. She knew if her fears had grounds Britomart would not hesitate to tell her.

"Then your quarrel with Henry Miller is nothing but a lovers' tiff?" she ventured.

"More than that, mother; I have come to utterly despise that man!"

"Oh, Britomart!"

"It is so; I could never marry a man for whom I had no respect. You saw Dennis Blair rescue the toad and bring it to a place of safety, where it could resume its innocent little life. Henry Miller would have scorned to touch the repulsive little victim. He might have stopped out of idle curiosity to watch the struggle."

"There are many tender-hearted men who would have done the same, Britomart, yet who wouldn't make their fellow-beings suffer."

"Henry Miller is not one of them; he loves to

make his fellow-beings suffer. He loves to be pitted against Bid Leeklaw, or poor, ignorant Jake Flatterbush, and torture them with his ready tongue and cheap wit; but, like the bully that he is, let a man who can talk, and who has the knowledge to down him in his hackneyed arguments, get hold of him, and he is angry at once, and begins to strut and bluster like a disturbed turkey."

Mrs. Landor sighed heavily. "It seemed such an easy way out," she said.

Britomart's foot tapped the step nervously. "Out of what?" she asked.

"Out of the difficulties of life, for you," answered Mrs. Landor. "A girl must marry; there isn't any other comfortable way for her in this world; and if she runs across a man who is able to support her decently, and whom she can, by hook or crook, endure, she had better take him."

Britomart flung out her hand with a gesture of anger.

"I shall never marry for such a reason; I'll starve first! Is it right that a woman should be forced to such a crime for a living?" She had risen and was pacing back and forth on the platform, her eyes full of angry tears.

"It ain't right, Britomart, and it ain't just; but it is a fact, all the same, and you can't get round it. Your father is getting poorer every day. We're bound to lose this farm before a great many years, and then what will become of us? I'm sure I don't know! If you were

married and provided for it would take a great load off my mind."

Blair, having disposed of his protege and washed his hands with Mr. Landor and William John at the back of the house, came round to the front again. An impulse seized Britomart to tell this man her troubles and hear his solution of them in her mother's presence.

"Mr. Blair, my mother thinks I ought to marry Miller, the Belleville editor, even though I hate him, because he can support me, and my father cannot much longer. What shall I do! What shall I do!" and, in a storm of sobs she buried her head in her mother's lap.

Both Blair and Mrs. Landor were startled at the girl's demonstration. Their eyes met for an instant in helpless pity. Mrs. Landor caressed the dark head in her lap in miserable silence. Blair sat down on the outer edge of the platform and, clasping a knee with his hands, gazed away over the grove.

"Poor little toad," he murmured. "Poor little toad!"

Suddenly Mrs. Landor's dislike for Blair died, and a premonition came to her that through him "a way out" would be found for Britomart. There was silence for a few minutes, broken only by Britomart's sobs. At last these ceased and she raised her head, her face showing the effect of the storm which had passed over her. It had been an exhibition unprecedented in Mrs. Landor's experience. She had not seen Brito-

mart weep since the days of her childhood; and, had her mother but known it, it was not so much her own dilemma as that of the entire race of womankind which called forth that despairing storm of tears. The fate which threatened her was the fate of the feminine world, and the horror of it overcame her, hence her instinctive turning for sympathy to the Socialist.

Mr. Landor and William John came round the house all washed and ready for tea.

"What's the matter with Britomart?" inquired William John.

Mrs. Landor made a sign that he should be silent, then Blair turned and addressed Britomart exactly as though they were alone.

"When, in my wanderings—and I am a wanderer, Miss Landor—I come across personalities like yours, strong to influence their fellow-men, active, progressive, I long to set them thinking—learning—doing! I crave your youth, strength and beauty for our cause—for the cause of right and humanity. Leave the marrying and giving in marriage, the rearing of children, and the keeping of houses, to such women as—well, our pretty little neighbor on the hill over there; but for yourself, I believe yours might be a broader mission."

There was silence again for a minute. William John kicked abstractedly at a pebble in the path. There was a stern look on John Landor's face, and the corners of his mouth drooped with the seriousness of his thoughts. In the heart of

the mother a new fear was rising, a fear for the future of this handsome daughter, from whom safety and humble domesticity, such as she had always foreseen for her, seemed to be slipping away. If she only could have loved Henry Miller! But in Britomart's heart hope was coming like the rising of the dawn. Why was it that this man, Dennis Blair, could always dispel the shadows of her life.

She went to his side. "If you think there is anything in me worthy of this work, if nature has endowed me with capabilities which study might perfect, if I might prove of benefit to the cause we have at heart, I hereby dedicate myself to it, body and soul!"

She held out her hand to him, and his white, supple one closed over it tightly, locking it for a moment from sight. To the mother, sitting in the doorway, it was like an espousal, not to the man who held her daughter's hand, but to a cause, an idea, shadowy, uncertain and dangerous.

"In the meantime, you must live," continued Blair; "and so must we. Mrs. Landor is patience itself to wait so long. Let us go in to tea."

At the supper table the subject was discussed exhaustively by the family, and Blair unfolded his plan. Britomart must perfect herself at something with which to make a living. He suggested it should be her music. He believed in it and in her exceptional willingness and abil-

ity to work. "One who proposes to be successful in music," he said, "must not have a lazy hair in his head."

Britomart laughed. "I wonder what old Mr. and Mrs. Leven would say to that doctrine. They believe music should only be indulged in during moments of rare idleness."

William John moved uneasily in his chair. "I don't think any of you do Leven's folks justice," he said. "Of course, they are just plain, old-fashioned farmer people, but not to be laughed at for that."

"You are a good boy, William John, to stick up for people who abuse you—old Leven does, and Tilly too, for that matter."

"No such thing!" declared William John, and Britomart said no more, but joined in the conversation, which drifted back to her own future.

Blair advised that she go to the city in the fall to study music. He promised to aid her in meeting expenses by obtaining a few scholars for her, and perhaps some work in a humble capacity in a publishing house with which he was connected in an indirect way. This would give her an opportunity to study the social question, not only in books but also in the streets of a great city.

"I want your heart to be in it so seriously that, like great reformers, you will be willing to lay aside all questions of personal interest, to devote strength, happiness, and if need be, life, to the cause you espouse. It is such people we

want—both men and women. If, after awhile, you find you are not equal to this, that your zeal is not great enough for such sacrifices, there will have been no great harm done, at least.”

“You need not fear that!” exclaimed Britomart. “Ignorant as I still am of the breadth of the question, I could die, like Joan of Arc, for my country!”

“Ah, my dear young lady, you will not be called upon to face literal death, but instead the flames of disdain, the sharp sword of sarcasm. The bitter hurt of being misunderstood is worse than physical torture. It is to work with no hope of immediate reward—or reward at any time—this is the hard task I set you.”

There was a quick step on the porch, and the next instant the door flew open and a young man entered with a small satchel in his hand.

“Paul!” cried Britomart, and John Landor said, “Well, well!” while William John stumbled over his chair in his eagerness to greet his brother.

“What brings you home?” asked his mother, while hurriedly making preparations to warm over the remnants of the supper for Paul.

“Got nothing to do,” announced the newcomer, sullenly.

“Dear me!” lamented Mrs. Landor; “Too bad!”

“I don’t know as it is so bad.” Paul flung out the words angrily. “It was no job at best. Look at the way I’ve been working for the last

two years! Put in my time learning my trade, and since that have worked one month and laid off three, eating up, meanwhile, everything I earned. I tell you, I am sick of it! The other fellows tramp. When the shops shut down in one town they go on a roaring drunk, have one good time with whatever they have left, and then go box-carring to some other place to find a job."

"Dear me!" reiterated good Mrs. Landor, "Are they all like that, Paul? I am glad you are not going to stay among them if that is the case."

"Humph! What difference does it make? I've got to work somewhere, and in Chicago, where I think of going, it may be worse yet, and Lord knows whether I can get a job at all when I get there."

"Don't go," trembled his mother. "Stay here at home with us on the farm."

Paul laughed recklessly.

"That was the reason I pulled out of here in the first place, because there was danger of us all getting run out on the mortgage. I thought I was going to do great things by hard work and being steady, but there is no premium on being steady, I can tell you. Men give you no credit for that. A drunken tramp is most always a good all-round man, so long as he is sober; and for obvious reasons, he is sober until he gets his first wages, and when he drinks so hard he can't attend to his work there will be no loss in dis-

charging him, for there are from six to a dozen of his like, just as good, sitting in a row, waiting and longing to take his place. They will work cheap, too, in spite of the unions, to get enough to satisfy their cravings for food and drink."

"The same old story!" cried Britomart, passionately; "the same old tragedy! Mother, how dared you and father bring children into the world to face such awful problems!"

Her father answered the question: "God knows, my girl, I should have trembled at the responsibility if I had known, but until I read Blair's books here, and talked with him, I didn't realize where we American farmers had got ourselves."

Paul Landor had taken but small notice of the stranger in his home until his father's words aroused his interest, and he turned with a look of curiosity at the man he had ignored before.

"What books?" he asked sullenly.

Blair had risen. "I must go," he said; "I have work to do. Whatever books they are, they are at your service. I may be able to help you to a job in Chicago; and if I can, be sure I will. Good-night."

"He is a striking-looking fellow. Where did he come from?" asked Paul. And straightway Paul was taken into the family confidence, and the clock struck twelve and still the Landors—father, sons and daughter—sat about the clean dining room, which was lighted by one small lamp, and discussed the social problems of the

day, their own financial difficulties, Britomart's plans, and most earnestly of all, Dennis Blair, his work and words.

"I'm going to see this fellow tomorrow!" cried Paul. "By George! I've got a big respect for a fellow, I don't care who he is—an 'ex-con' even—who looks at these things as he does. There is something mighty unjust somewhere, I can tell you, and the more you get out into the world and knock up against it, the more you find it out."

True to his word, the next morning, bright and early, found Paul Landor at Dennis Blair's door, and never a day passed after that in which Blair did not find a few minutes to talk with the headstrong, impulsive boy, who was, he discovered, well on the road to ruin, owing to the influences of bad companions and hopeless labor.

"They are all bad, and why shouldn't they be?" demanded Paul. "Mechanics can't hold a job and support a family and enjoy a home any more. Their work only lasts at best a few months at a time in a place; then they must tramp or starve. What effect does this way of living have on men?"

"Makes a nation of tramps," Blair assented, sadly. "But you, Paul Landor, the world has work for such as you, though you starve in the doing of it. In the first place, I want you to take care of your sister during her study-time in Chicago. I consider her a wonderful woman. I have long known that there was work in the

socialistic field for a few women with good physiques, ready wit, and strong white hands, capable of beckoning rough men to something better than they have known, a more concerted action. Such women have, at certain times and places, more influence than the most brilliant men. Aside from this work, however, she must have an honest way to earn her bread. You must help her prepare for this."

"You bet I'll help her!" said Paul. "Mother was telling me they were trying to marry her to that damned Belleville 'Weekly' man, Miller. Instead of giving him Britomart I'll give him a thrashing for an editorial which came out in his sniveling little one-horse sheet awhile ago, against workingmen's unions. I tell you if it weren't for the unions I don't know how laboring men would ever get their rights."

"The first thing we laboring men have to learn is to keep our tempers," answered Blair. "We 'thrash' too much, my boy. Less talking—more working in harmony. Nothing is gained by wrangling, and it wears—it wears. Work, use your influence, but keep your temper."

"Mr. Blair, that is almost impossible. Sometimes I feel like turning anarchist and blowing up everything in sight with dynamite!"

"And it is men of this stamp—thoughtless, ignorant blunderers—who handicap the cause of Socialism!" Blair said, sternly.

Paul reddened and for a moment was inclined to resent the man's impudence.

Blair continued: "There's nothing our enemies love to say of us so much as that we are anarchists at heart; that, if we had our way, we would bring about another French Revolution. It is not by such methods we would work. It must be by the better, surer way of education."

"And meantime die of want! A starving man can't stop to argue with a thief who has stolen his crust."

Blair shrugged his shoulders. "If the thief is the stronger of the two, little he will care for the puny kicking of a dwarf about his shins."

"The American laborer is no dwarf, Mr. Blair."

"In his present unorganized state he is a dwarf, writhing in the clutches of the giant Capital. When he comes to know how to use his strength to the best advantage he will surely conquer; but that day is not yet. In the meantime it is the duty of the more intelligent among us to study—make ourselves masters of facts in order to enlighten our less fortunate brothers. We must also learn to use tact in doing this, for men do not like to be convicted of ignorance."

"Your brother's resolve to seek work in Chicago simplifies our plans a good deal," Blair said to Britomart one evening. "You need his help and he certainly needs yours. He is hot-headed and obstinate to a degree, and has much to learn. I should hesitate about advising him to seek work in Chicago if it were not for the

restraining influence you may have upon him there. He looks at life through revengeful eyes."

"Paul is not easy to manage," Britomart owned, "and my influence, I am afraid, will count very little with him; but yours, Mr. Blair, will be everything."

"It will take us both," Blair said, reflectively; "and you have more influence over him than you know."

"I don't know that I have any, but I do know that if any other man had said the things which you have said to Paul there would have been a good deal of unpleasantness."

Blair smiled but made no answer, and they went in to begin the lesson which must be neglected for nothing. Britomart was working hard to acquire all the knowledge and practice possible before her advent into the city and the assumption of more serious study.

CHAPTER VII.

"It's like a funeral, isn't it?"

Britomart was standing with William John in the door of the little brown house amid the wheatfields. It was late September, and Blair had finished the book he had come into the country to write, bidden them all good-bye that morning, and gone to Chicago, accompanied by Paul. The door of the house stood open, and there was a mark on the sod where the boxes had been dragged to the express wagon which had come from Belleville to take them away.

"When he went to pay his rent old Leven read him a lecture on the evils of his ways."

"Humph!" grunted William John. "What did Blair say to him?"

"Not a word. He meekly took it all, because Leven is an old man and has had but little chance to remedy his ignorance. Blair says he feels a pity for such a man which is a pain."

William John grunted again. "That old man gives me a pain continually." Old Leven had not been very polite to William John of late on account of their differences of opinion, although William John had harbored no very rabid Socialistic views and had taken particular pains not to air those he had in the old man's presence.

"He knows as much as Tilly, and more, too," said Britomart. "William John, I can't bear the

thought of your marrying Tilly Leven! What is there about the girl which attracts you? You are such a sensible boy, and Tilly talks nonsense; you like to think of great things, and Tilly cares for nothing but to fix herself up and crochet edges for her skirts."

"She's only a domestic little body, to be sure, Bee; but I like such women."

"Oh, then, I've nothing more to say!" snapped Britomart. "If your taste runs to imbeciles, of course you have the best right in the world to indulge it!"

"You are awful hard on her, Britomart. You are very bright—away above the average—and of course you look down on a simple little thing like Tilly."

"Oh, William John, you've been kissing the Blarney stone. Don't try to flatter me."

But she could not help being a little pleased that William John had such a high opinion of her powers.

"I don't know, Bee; but ever since I've grown a man I've had a picture in my mind of Tilly sitting by an open window with a Bible in her lap, a bunch of posies in a glass can on the window sill, her light hair all in cunning little ringlets around her forehead, and something white about her throat; and there she sits, waiting for me to come home to supper. I saw her sitting like that once long ago, and I always dream of that picture when I think of our married life."

"Oh, William John, you are chasing a Will-o-

the wisp. The girl you love is not Tilly Leven at all, but one manufactured out of your own brain, and who never had an existence anywhere else; but I shan't bother you any more about the matter, and if you marry Tilly, I'll do my best to be a sister to her. It's going to be awful hard work." She gave him a loving little push as he went round the house on his way to their meadow.

She watched him go out of sight, then sat down on the steps to think awhile. Since she knew she was to leave it, this quiet country life had an added charm for her. It was so still in the old deserted garden. The sun shone hot on the lilac bushes, and Britomart drowsily watched the cobwebs which stretched from bough to bough. She was thinking how restful it was and that she hated to move, to break the silence, when a sudden whir of buggy wheels broke it for her, and a dripping horse was reined to the gate.

Henry Miller descended from the carriage and came up the walk toward her. She had not seen him since the Sunday she declined to go driving with him, and she was vexed that he should find her here, mooning about Blair's deserted cottage. It would lend color to the tales which were in circulation about the neighborhood in regard to her infatuation for Blair. She was not glad to see Miller, but she forced herself to be cordial. Her connection with him had been fraught with so much unhappiness that his pres-

ence could never be other than distasteful to her.

"Grieving over the departed?" he asked, coolly taking a seat beside her. "Paul's gone with him, hey?"

"Yes," Britomart responded, "and I'm going in a couple of months."

Miller grew red and little beads of sweat began to form around his mustache.

"Do you mean that, Britomart?" he asked, and his voice trembled. He never meant any of the time to give up this magnificent girl. He only meant to make her realize the chances she was taking in not bending to his will; but he feared, at this moment, he had carried his punishment too far.

"To be sure I mean it," Britomart said.

"You are going to marry that anarchist?"

"What anarchist? Mr. Miller, you frighten me!" She rose and pulled her skirts together in her hand as though she would run away.

Miller ignored her jest.

"Are you going to marry Dennis Blair?"

"Not that I know of. At least he has never hinted such a thing."

"Perhaps he disbelieves in marriage, along with all other law."

"He is a great believer in law, Mr. Miller, a great admirer of law and justice, and he has taught me much concerning it."

"Well, let's not talk of him any more, Bee; he's gone and we've done with him. I have come for a serious talk with you, and I am glad

I have found you up here alone. I haven't been doing right for the last few weeks, I acknowledge, and I don't blame you for being put out with me. I am sorry for the way I have acted, and have come out here to ask your forgiveness."

He reached for her hand, and, a little to his surprise, she gave it to him at once and hastened to say: "I think you wrong yourself, Mr. Miller."

"Don't 'Mr. Miller' me, Britomart."

"You haven't done wrong by me, I am sure, and I have no hard feeling in my heart for you. Let that suffice. I'm sure we shall always be the best of friends." Then she tried to withdraw her hand, but he held it fast.

"No, Britomart, we must be more or less than friends. I want you for my wife, and you are the only girl in the country I do want; and what's more, I'm bound to have you. You were all right before that—well, that Blair fellow, came sneaking around; you know you were."

"That 'Blair fellow,' as you call him, had nothing to do with the change in my mind—that is, nothing directly."

"Well, it's all over now, as I said before, Britomart, and I'm willing to forgive you for it. As I said just now, I haven't done right myself. I've been flirting outrageously with that little niece of Dr. McDougal's, Miss St. Clare; and she, poor little thing, is quite infatuated with me—runs after me all the time."

Britomart again attempted, unsuccessfully, to withdraw her hand from his clasp.

"Then why don't you make her happy by marrying her? Please let go my hand, Mr. Miller; you hurt me."

"Now, Britomart, don't keep up your jealousy any longer. It's all over between me and Mattie St. Clare. I don't want her; I want you, and I'm sure if I am willing to forgive you for your flirtation with the anarchist, you ought to be willing to overlook mine with Mattie. But that's the way with women; it's all right when they are flirting, but the devil is to pay when the man begins the same thing."

Britomart rose hurriedly and stood in the path.

"You must be very dull indeed if you can't understand that I am not jealous of Mattie St. Clare. I am willing you should wait upon her and marry her to your heart's content, Mr. Miller. I do not wish to marry you. I do want to be friends with you, but to marry you, I never shall. Let us drop the subject. It is not that I am jealous or angry or not sure of my own feelings. I never loved you, and I had no business to encourage you."

"But you did encourage me. For over a year I came to your house, and you intended to marry me; now, didn't you?"

Britomart was obliged to admit that she did.

"Then what made you change your mind so suddenly? Don't tell me, Britomart Landor,

that it was not Blair who did it. You are in love with him and you intend to tag him to the city, whether he wants you or not, and I don't much believe he does. Mark my words, it will be a sorry day for you when you go to Chicago."

Britomart's face was aflame. She felt as though she must step to Miller's side and strike him.

"I have offered to be your friend; I withdraw that offer," she said. "I hope never to see your face again," and she swept down the path and out at the gate, walking swiftly down the hill.

Miller stood glaring after her through his spectacles, his puffy face red with emotion. The farther the possibility of his getting this girl receded from him, the more ardent his desire for her became. It was not altogether his admiration for her which actuated him. It was more a feeling of revenge toward Dennis Blair, and spite and hatred for Britomart herself. He ground an oath between his teeth and hurried to untie his horse. A buggy came over the hill, and Brother Granby's fat, self-satisfied face came into view like a rising moon.

"Good-afternoon, good-afternoon, Brother Miller. How are you today?"

An inspiration seized Henry Miller. If he could not hold Britomart to her allegiance by his own will, he would enlist the powers surrounding her—her pastor, her mother, father, brothers—anybody and everybody. He felt he could almost sacrifice his political convictions,

for a time at least, to accomplish his purpose of making her his wife.

"I am very well in health—in health, Mr. Granby; but—" with a sheepish smile—"I am not very happy just at present. You know I have been paying my addresses to Miss Landor for over a year now."

"Yes, yes; Lord bless you," interpolated Brother Granby.

"And everything was very pleasant; her mother was willing and all her people were well pleased. She herself was very grateful for my attentions, as well she might be, if I do say it."

"Certainly, certainly."

"She is not considered a pretty girl, and her people are in rather straitened circumstances. She has never moved in any society to speak of, and I, being a business man and fairly well-to-do—well, Mr. Granby, you understand it would have been rather a pleasant arrangement for the Landors, especially Frank, whose business depends on my paper for advertising——"

"Just so, just so," assented the minister, reaching a big flabby hand for the whip with which to flick off a fly.

"Then this man—this Blair—comes along and puts the d— all sorts of notions into her head, makes love to her on the sly, and the fat is all in the fire. She actually contemplates following the fellow to the city—to the city, mind you—she, an unprotected girl! A country girl, with

no more knowledge of the world than a baby. What will become of her?"

"It is terrible!" cried Brother Granby; "it is terrible! What can Brother Landor be thinking of! What can Sister Landor be thinking of!"

"I wish—I wish—" faltered Miller, with becoming modesty; "I wish you would speak to her parents or her brothers. Of course, I don't know as there could ever be anything between us after this, but for the girl's sake, whom I pity from the bottom of my heart, I wish you would speak to her parents."

"Tut, tut, Brother Miller; don't say that. You must be willing to forgive. Of course you must. You must take her back to your heart again. I shall certainly speak to her people; and never fear, I can open their eyes a bit, I assure you. Brother Landor is a conscientious man and a consistent member of the church, and when he is aroused—aroused, enlightened, mind you, as to the facts in the case, you need have no fear in regard to this misguided girl. It is terrible, terrible, that such people are abroad in the land to lead unsuspecting youth astray! I will drive right down to Brother Landor's."

And so it was that Britomart, flushed and panting, had not yet removed her hat when the messenger of peace arrived and proceeded to tie his horse. John Landor, coming up from the barns, which were across the road from the house, encountered him at the gate, and the labor of rescue began.

The Landor men had left the field early in order that William John might take the team and go after Mary and Sir Bumpy, who was coming to make his first visit at his paternal grandfather's. Mrs. Landor was bustling about making preparations for an extra tea in Mary's honor.

"There, isn't it lucky," she said to Britomart, as she entered, "that we've got blackberries enough for supper. Here's the minister, and it looks as though he was going to stay to tea."

"Goodness!" snapped Britomart, "I wish he were a thousand miles away. He is always just where you don't want him!"

"Britomart," remonstrated Mrs. Landor, "is that the way to speak of your pastor?"

"But I've something to tell you, mother——"

Any further explanation was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Landor with Brother Granby, who bore a grieved look on his face, evidently believing he had been treated disrespectfully.

"Now, here she is, Brother Granby, and if you have anything to say on the subject, you must say it to her. My daughter is old enough, and I believe smart enough, to look out for herself. Britomart, Brother Granby thinks you have made a great mistake in throwing over your chance to marry Henry Miller and going to the city instead. He doesn't think you will be safe in the city; he doesn't think the ones who advised you to make the move are reliable folks."

Britomart bowed coolly, and placed a chair for

the minister and sat down herself, determined to keep her temper no matter at what cost. Was ever a girl so beset?

Brother Granby opened his case with his usual lack of tact, plunging in and wallowing like a porpoise in seas of supposition, sentiment and black forebodings.

In the midst of his labors a welcome interruption occurred in the arrival of Sir Bumpy, attended by his suite of mother and Uncle William John. Britomart snatched the baby from Mary's arms and nearly smothered him with kisses.

"Ah," groaned Brother Granby, "and I had hoped to see you, my dear, misguided young friend, with children of your own in your arms, to rise up and call you blessed."

"What in the world's up?" whispered Mary, as she passed Britomart to lay her things on the bed.

Britomart made a grimace and a backward motion of the head toward the sighing Brother Granby, and Mrs. Landor announced that tea was ready.

After tea Brother Granby resumed his labors.

"Your religion, my dear Sister Landor, is not your religion strong enough to cause you to wish to do the will of the Lord?"

"Yes, Brother Granby, it is. I sincerely wish to do the will of the Lord."

"Then why not give up the foolish project of studying music in Chicago, and stay here where duty calls?"

"Because I am not certain that it is the will of the Lord that I should do so. I think it is Henry Miller's will, and—yours."

Bumpy's mother buried her face in the baby's neck to suppress a giggle, and Bumpy laughed outright, as though he understood the matter.

"And, oh," continued Brother Granby, "my heart is saddened to know that you have adopted these lawless principles of Socialism!"

Britomart took the baby in her arms, that the contact of his soft little body might restrain her if she grew too harsh. She meant, despite the warning looks of her mother, to fire some hard truths at the blundering old man, but she did not wish to be rude. She would not for the world have been guilty of the coarseness in dealing with personalities in which he had indulged since his entrance into her home; but she intended, as kindly as possible, to enlighten his ignorance, although in so doing she should be obliged to wound his gigantic egotism.

"You speak of my religion, Brother Granby. I never had any until I became a Socialist. My heart was full of unspoken anger against my fellow-men. I felt that I and my people were being hardly dealt with; that we were called to labor hopelessly all our lives, and hopeless labor, you will admit, Brother Granby, will harden the human heart. You adjured us to be content because it was the will of the Lord, and my heart was hard and bitter against God. I refused to pray to a God who claimed to be just,

yet ground nine-tenths of his subjects into the earth in poverty and gave the remaining tenth more than was good for them. I hated my fellow-men because I was jealous and envious of the more fortunate. What kind of a religion was that which you were helping to establish in my heart? You see, I was young and groping for truths. I went every Sabbath day with my people to hear you preach, and ever and always I hungered to hear some word of comfort—of explanation from your mouth; but—forgive me, Brother Granby, this I know is a hard thing to say—I never heard one. You never dropped a sentence tending to make me a better woman. You talked continually of a Heaven far away and shadowy; but I am young, with a strong body and mind, to be satisfied somehow in this world. I want a salvation for my body as well as my soul. I am willing—yes, anxious—to work and work hard; but I have an American spirit in me, which forbids that work to be done for a master. We young Americans have none of the old world serf-spirit born in us. You see how it was, Brother Granby—I hated God and I hated man, ignorant thing that I was. I was contemplating marrying a man whom I knew I did not love because I believed it was the fate of women to submit to these hard conditions of God's law. I had no way of supporting myself, and no money to keep me while I educated myself in some branch with which I might earn that support. Is it any wonder that I hated everything,

and a God who permitted such injustice most of all?

"Then came Dennis Blair, the Socialist, and uttered simple truths to me which comforted me and changed my whole point of vision; truths which, it seems to me now, a wayfaring person, though a fool, might have found out for himself. He told me simply that it was not God's plan that there should always be grinding poverty for the masses and debasing opulence for the few. He laid the wrong where it belonged, at the door of human misrule and ignorance. He pointed out to me that Christ was a Socialist; that when he preached the sermon on the mount his words were not mere vaporings, which sounded well but meant nothing, as too many of our preachers' words do today, but were real, were actually to be the inspiration which was to bring about a condition of happiness and goodness for all men. He even intimated that I, in my womanish weakness, might give a little impetus to the great ball of progress, and, by setting my feeble shoulder to the work, could send it a bit further on its way. He thinks there will be more Christianity in this than in binding myself to a man whom I dislike, merely to get food and clothes.

"You just now intimated some fearful dangers which awaited me in the city. Why do you warn me so earnestly of these sins against my womanhood which I might be beguiled into committing there, yet advise me to commit the same sin here

with the sanction of the church and society. I tell you if I had not become a Socialist, I should have become an atheist, because I felt I could not worship a God so cruel as to condemn the majority of his creatures to poverty, crime and prostitution.

"There is another thing I wish to say to you, Brother Granby, in all kindness, before I finish, and that is, study this question of Socialism a little. Find out what it really is, and then you will never again couple the words Socialism and anarchy as you did in your sermon two weeks ago. It is your duty to study it; indeed, the clergy must study and embrace it if they would keep their hold upon the masses. Many of the younger ones are doing so. The people want to be told how to be good; they need instruction and, naturally, they look to the pulpit for it. Their preacher, to fulfill his mission, must be in reality, as well as in name, their teacher. In order to do this he must keep abreast of the times, touch the questions of the day, even if by so doing he is obliged to neglect some of the 'isms and 'ologies.

"Forgive me, Brother Granby, for presuming to teach a clergyman old enough to be my father. I should not have done it except to vindicate myself. You see, you made the sweeping accusation that I was headstrong, would not accept the teachings I was privileged to hear—that I was carried away by a foolish idea and a villain-

ous teacher. I had to vindicate my friend as well as myself.

"As for my sojourn in the city, I shall be as safe as the average young woman. I am to keep house for my brother, Paul, and only await the word that he has found work to go to him and make him as comfortable a little home as possible on the small allowance we shall possess."

Brother Granby had not heard this little speech in perfect silence. There had been horrified ejaculations of "Ah, my dear young friend!" "Hold a bit, hold a bit; you are mistaken," but in the main, Britomart held the floor.

In his top buggy, an hour later, jogging towards home through the dusk, he thought of many good things he might have said if they had occurred to him at the right time. He also thought over the young woman's astonishing words with much seriousness, and determined to secretly study up the question which seemed to have captured the hearts of the entire Landor family. He tried to feel that he had been unnecessarily brow-beaten; but upon recalling Britomart's even, quiet manner, her evident freedom from anger, being a just man, he was obliged to admit that, although sharp and, coming from so young a person, rather presuming, it in no way overstepped the bounds of politeness.

Brother Granby was a good man, but naturally obtuse and not quick to grasp new ideas. He was kept so busy with pastoral duties, that is, running about making foolish and meaningless

calls, attending dime suppers and missionary teas, that he had not much time for study, and consequently stood up to teach the lesson of how to live rightly in this day and age without any better material than a bundle of old, worn-out phrases which had grown absolutely meaningless through much use.

Mrs. Landor rocked his royal highness, Sir Bumpy, while the two young women went for a walk after Brother Granby had gone.

"It was dreadful, I think, Britomart, for you to talk so to a minister of the gospel."

"I know it," owned Britomart; "but, Mary, I just could not help it! Think of the insulting things he said to me—positively insulting, and all in that self-satisfied manner, as though he had a perfect right to because he was a minister. The idea of his coming to me from Henry Miller to plead his cause without knowing any of my reasons. He didn't care for them, you see. Henry Miller had reasons and he considered those enough."

The girls walked on up the western hill in silence until they arrived at the little house on the crest; here they paused and leaned upon the gate, listening to the peeping and twittering of a bird in the woods across the road and the boom of the frogs in the meadow to the north.

Mary broke the silence. "Britomart, are you sure you are not in love with the Socialist instead of Socialism?" -

Britomart laughed. "Do you know, Mary,

that has troubled me a good deal. I know the attacks which unoccupied maiden hearts, the age of mine, are subject to, and I questioned myself narrowly to find out if, after all, incipient personal love for this man, instead of a firm and true conversion to his doctrines, was the sentiment which actuated me. I remember when young Morris, the evangelist, was here, how Tilly Leven got religion, and wouldn't dance nor go to the circus, and how quickly she recovered from it when he went away; and, really, I believe if I could ever fall in love with anybody, it would be with Dennis Blair. He is so good, so wise, so unassuming. I consider the man a martyr to his principles. He is working night and day for a cause he believes to be the only hope for suffering humanity. I admire him, but I do not love him in the way you mean, and in the way I was afraid of, and"—with a little shrug—"it wouldn't do me a bit of good if I did. Love and marriage are as far from the mind of Dennis Blair as is murder."

CHAPTER VIII.

The summer—Britomart's last at home—began to wane. The grain had long been stacked and much already thrashed, and farmers were drawing great loads to town, returning with sour faces and lank purses. As usual when they were ready with their hard-earned produce, prices dropped to the lowest figure. The stubble fields stretched in unbroken regularity, save here and there a rich ribbon of black, to show where some enterprising toiler had begun his fall plowing. Such a ribbon encircled one of the faded yellow fields of the Landor farm, and every day William John trudged after the span of bays with the music of the softly ripping earth in his ears and the wholesome smell of it in his nostrils, always patient, taking toil and disappointment with the same philosophical sweetness. He was one of the uncomplaining ones of earth, totally unlike his brother, Paul, who, if one smote him on the cheek, was apt, in return, to place a ringing slap where it would do the most good, before he obeyed the Bible injunction and turned the other cheek.

William John was far from happy. His love was his life, and whatever occurred to disturb its course affected his peace.

Old Leven had taken an unreasoning dislike to the entire Landor family since their espousal of Dennis Blair's doctrines. He never saw the

stooping shoulders and drooping straw hat of John Landor near his own line but he began a droning conversation, the burden of which was misguided people who were trying to ruin the country by harboring new ideas.

At this time bimetalism was beginning to agitate the country, and the papers were full of it. Leven did not understand the term very clearly. He only knew from his abusive party paper, the only sheet he ever saw, that it was not in favor with the republican party; hence his hatred of it.

At first John Landor tried to reason calmly with his neighbor; to give his views and, on the other hand, listen to Leven's, comparing the arguments for and against. He soon learned that this was perfectly useless. His neighbor had no reasons. He voted the republican ticket because he voted the republican ticket, and he did not hesitate to declare that any man who voted any other ticket, no matter which, was a thief and a liar. His fiddle-shaped face would grow pale with passion, and his knotty old hands saw the air in such a frenzy that John Landor feared he might fall down in a fit some day among his stooks of grain.

There had never been any great degree of intimacy between the families, until Tilly set her cap at William John.

Poor William John! Those Sunday evenings before the political cloud arose were among the happiest recollections of his life. Happy is too

feeble a word to describe them. Dazzling, bewildering, would be more appropriate.

To think that he, big, awkward William John Landor, should be tolerated in—aye, even invited into—that sacred room, the parlor, with its store carpet, its darkly varnished table in the middle, with the best lamp set squarely in the center on a fringed paper mat, flanked on one side by the photograph album, on the other by the family Bible, each with a crocheted cover, the work of Tilly's fair hands.

A carpet lounge, hard as Pharaoh's heart, with an uncomfortable rotundity which, had William John been older and not in love, would have been a torture to him, graced one side of the room. On one wall hung a framed Odd Fellow's Emblem, with a great eye in the center that was very awesome to William John, as representing God's eye; on the opposite wall a silver plate reserved from the coffin-lid of some departed friend, shone from a mahogany frame with as cheerful a luster as circumstances would permit. At times, when the light struck it just right, the young man could discern the inscription thereon, "Sarah H., aged 21 Yrs." A hair wreath and a swaying air-castle made of worn-out sheets, completed the decorations of the room. The arrangement of hair, the all-seeing eye, and even the coffin-plate, were cheerful compared to that ghostly, swaying air-castle, especially in the dusk of evening before Tilly came in with the lamp. William John could not ig-

nore the fact of its resemblance to the pale wraith in hoop-skirts of Sarah, aged 21.

But when Tilly came in with the lamp, and, placing it on the table, sank upon the bloated sofa at his side, what rapture—what ecstasy! How soft and pink-and-white and beautiful she was! How could such a beautiful creature care for such a great clodhopper as himself! In the winter time she wore a snuff-colored henrietta cloth, of which she made every stitch herself, she told William John, and it was a source of never-ending wonder to him that a young girl, unassisted, could accomplish such results.

Britomart laughed at the dress and scouted the idea that it was a work of art. She had even intimated to her brother that if Tilly were not the most self-satisfied young woman on earth, she would know that the darts were crooked and twisted to one side, that it was too short-waisted and that the skirt hitched up in the back.

"If I were in Tilly's place I never would brag about having made that dress myself," she told William John. "Of course, it's all right to be economical, and if you really had to wear such a garment, wear it, and say nothing; but to brag about it is very silly."

But William John considered this jealousy on the part of Britomart for a prettier girl, as very natural, and his sister's one fault. About her throat Tilly wore cotton lace supported by a red ribbon tie; a row of pretty, crimped frizzes across her forehead; and when William John grew bold

enough to touch her hand it sent a thrill to the very toes of his best Sunday shoes. Never, if he lives a hundred years, will he forget those first nights of courting in that fear-inspiring parlor. To think that Britomart considered him too good for such a girl!

All this happiness was before John Landor and his sons experienced a change of heart in politics; for, despite himself, William John was obliged to admit the truth in what Dennis Blair, and later his father, declared, and when Old Leven pinned him with a knotty forefinger and thumb, and asked him, point-blank, if he intended to vote the republican ticket at the fall election, he stammered, and at last admitted that he did not think he should. There was no other way, for William John would not have sacrificed his convictions even for his love, and to have lied to Tilly's father was beyond the bounds of possibility.

But what a change was there! William John saw the anger leap into the stupid old face and trembled, but held firm. After this the parlor was closed to him. Never again did he gaze on the swaying ghost of Sarah, aged 21, nor read the inscription sacred to the memory of the same, done in silver.

Tilly remained true, at least for awhile, and used to glorify the line fence by leaning her reddened elbows on it, and talking across it to William John surreptitiously; but a young man from "the other side of the lake" began courting her

occasionally, and William John saw with despair that his place in Tilly's heart was likely to be filled by another, with a top buggy and a double team.

So William John plowed and suffered, and Britomart's heart bled for him. There was so little brightness in the dear boy's life, and now this little gleam was to be snuffed out. And through it all he was so patient, so uncomplaining. Sometimes the girl clenched her hands and the angry tears sprang to her eyes. She felt as though she would like to stand in some high place and hurl invectives at Heaven and earth alike for placing such limitations of poverty and labor about her brother. As for herself and Paul, they were born fighters; they would pull through somehow or take it out of society in some way; but father, mother and William John meekly fitted the burdens to their shoulders and trudged their weary round.

"William John should have gone to college," railed Britomart, "and had a chance to be somebody, and he would have been somebody, too. Then he would have seen a different kind of a girl from Tilly Leven, the insignificant little baggage! But you take a good, green boy like William John, let an idiot like Tilly Leven begin making eyes at him, and no other girl within ten miles, and what is the consequence? And now that she has him right under her thumb, she is torturing him to her heart's content. Do you know, mother, I actually be-

lieve she intends throwing him over for Grady's hired man; and William John is breaking his heart over it and never saying a word. It will be a good thing for him in the long run. I have told him that a thousand times, but it makes me mad to see him plowing along with that pathetic droop to his mouth, and his shoulders getting stoopier every day. If Tilly Leven does this that I expect her to, and then ever tries to hang around me, I will give her a few uncomfortable minutes to avenge William John, I promise you!"

"Is that a right spirit, Britomart?"

"Perhaps not; but it is justice."

Britomart had a chance to put her threat into execution, for the late November snows were flying before Paul found work in Chicago steady enough to warrant him in sending for Britomart, and long before that time the hired man with a double team was making wheel tracks in an opposite direction from Leven's. Tilly, perfectly amiable, and willing to forgive William John, came down to call at Landor's about dinner time.

William John had gone to town with a grist. Of course, Tilly could not know this, and unwittingly exposed herself to the bottled-up wrath of his revengeful sister.

Gentle Mrs. Landor feared the worst when she saw Tilly coming unsuspectingly up the path, decked out for conquest in a brand-new gown, whose darts and skirt were more fearfully awry than usual. She had barely time to shoot an ad-

monitory glance at Britomart, which that warlike young person pretended not to see, before the victim was within doors and seated in the company chair, her hat lying on the bed, and an expectant eye bent on the back door, where, according to her calculations, the men would shortly appear for dinner. After the usual preliminaries about the weather, Tilly casually mentioned that she should have been down before, but had been very busy sewing, finishing the dress she wore.

"Too bad," said Britomart, "that you were obliged to make it yourself. One never gets a dress to fit on one's self. See how the darts pull to one side, and how crooked it fastens. Quite pretty material, too. For my part, I would rather economize in quality of cloth and have my dress fitted and well made by some one who understands such things. Nowadays the fashions change so rapidly no one can keep up with them except professional dressmakers. For instance, Miss Gridly, from Orion, was in town yesterday, and she tells me all shoulders are made very short and the sleeves high. You see, you are away behind the times. Have you ever seen Miss Gridly? She is such a pretty girl, and so stylish. William John is quite smitten with her. He says she is the first really pretty girl he has ever seen. Such dark eyes and hair! I shouldn't wonder much to see sleigh tracks starting from our house in the direction of Orion this winter."

Mrs. Landor announced that dinner was ready and invited Tilly to "sit by," that there was plenty of room, seeing that the men folks would not be home till late; but Tilly declined and, bidding them good day, hastened home to twitch her darts straight and look over the cloth which was left of her dress, to see if there was not at least enough to make new fronts with different shaped arm-holes.

"Britomart, how can you be so mean!" admonished Mrs. Landor.

Britomart laughed. "I am savage, mother, when I think of this fall and William John."

"But such falsehoods, Britomart! Who is Miss Gridly?"

Britomart ran and brought a big hardware catalogue, which she had utilized as a scrap-book, and, flapping the pages over, displayed a newspaper cut of a Southern beauty, with a round face and jet-black eyes and hair.

"It was no lie, mammy, not a bit of it. See? Miss Hattie Gridly, of Orion, Alabama; and when I was pasting her in, William John looked over my shoulder and made the remark that she was the prettiest girl he ever saw. Of course, Miss Mushey did not stop to consider that there is more than one Orion in the United States. Let her fret awhile."

"But William John will tell her the first time she questions him, and then she will know you were spiteful."

"I'll warn him not to."

And she did; William John, much to her astonishment and satisfaction, adopting the Miss Gridly fable as an excuse for not resuming the former pleasant relations with Tilly Leven. Slow as he was, and hard as the struggle had been to give up his first love, her easy acceptance of the attentions of a hired man with a double team, after all the sweet things she had said to him, was a revelation to William John. Besides, now that he had more time to devote to it, he was reading many of his sister's books, borrowed of Dennis Blair, and as he read his opinions became so pronounced he felt that he could never again have the patience with Old Man Leven's senseless vaporings which he once had. His heart beat with brotherly indignation when he read Paul's letters, which told of his struggle to obtain work; and he frequently gave vent to his strongest expletive of "Darn 'em!" as he read of arrogance of the millionaire employers and the savage domination of the foreign slave-drivers whom they find it to their advantage to make foremen in their shops.

"I tell you," wrote Paul, "I should have turned anarchist long ago if it were not for Blair. He is like a flax-seed poultice, soothing, at the same time, healing. He is a grand fellow, and if any one should say a word against him to me I would flatten him out if I went to jail for it—old Leven not excepted."

"If you are a Socialist up there in the country, I wonder what you will be in Chicago," he wrote

to Britomart. "The abject misery, the horror and helplessness of it makes one want to curse God and die. One day I had been tramping looking for honest work until I was ready to drop. Blair was with me. We started to cross the street when my foot slipped and I fell. A carriage at that moment came round the corner, and, although driver and occupant saw my plight, there was not a movement or a tightening of the reins. I should have been under the horses' feet if Blair's hand (which is strong enough to have broken the horse's neck, I believe) had not grasped the bridle and swung the beasts to one side with a jolt that nearly threw the driver from his high seat. The driver raised his whip as though to strike at Blair. I made a dive, not for the driver, poor lackey! but for the man in the carriage, who was coolly surveying the proceedings through an eye-glass, and, so help me God! I should have beaten his brains out against his own carriage doors if the same steel-like grip which turned the horses' heads had not fastened itself on my coat-collar, and I was for a moment as helpless as a dog in his hands.

"There he stood, grim, dabbled with mud, between the aristocrat and the down-trodden laboring-man, cool as ice, yet as invincible as that grip on my collar. The world has need of such as he—men who know enough to hold their tempers—to stand between the men in the carriages and the men in the mud. The man in the car-

riage rode on, thankless and ignorant that he owed his life to that slim, white hand of Dennis Blair's. That's the way with them. They feel so secure.

But, after all, I should have gotten the worst of it. It would have felt good, I can tell you, in the first hot moment, to see his complacent mug covered with his own blood. I feel the desire for it stir in me yet, while I write. But afterwards—Dennis Blair is right. It would not only have been I who would have suffered the punishment, but you, and father, and mother, and dear old William John. Personal violence is not the way out, so Blair says, and so I know, when I stop to think. The trouble is a hot-headed fool like me never stops to think until it is too late." — Once Blair wrote in one of Paul's letters: "I shall be glad when you come. We need you for anchorage."

After awhile Britomart received the letter telling her to come. "I have a job at beggarly wages, but it will do. My employer (you will think this is poetical justice) is the man with the eye-glass who nearly ran me down last month—Jeffries, by name. I can never see his face but that old feeling of blood-thirstiness crops up in me. He does not come often, thank fortune! He has no need to do even the arduous work of thinking for the concern himself. His part consists in gathering in the sheckels. I presume the man never did a day's work in his life, and never will. And yet, to see the airs he gives

himself, you would know in a minute he thinks he is made of finer metal than the most of the people he meets. Long ago his old grandfather bought a tract of land where the heart of Chicago now beats so fiercely, and his father established the manufacturing plant where I have the happiness to be a humble employe.

"It was not his grandfather's brains, nor his father's brains, nor his own, nor any especial amount of industry on the part of any one of them which has placed him where he is. It is pure, unadulterated luck, bred of our present economic system. That is why his airs of superiority gall me and make me long to cut his throat. Blair laughs at me, and says I would put on even more airs in his place. (I know better than that.) He says: 'Don't waste your breath railing at the individual plutocrat; strike at the system.' But that's too slow for me. I want some little individual revenge. I can't content myself with thinking that my grandchildren may have the chance of shaking hands in equality with his."

On the twentieth of November Britomart's trunk was packed and stood on the little porch. The family were going with her to Belleville, take dinner at Frank's, and see her off on the six o'clock train. It was rather a solemn ride to Belleville. It was a cold, biting day. There had been but little snow, but the hard frosts had blackened everything, and the landscape seemed without hope.

Farmer Landor and William John sat on the front seat, their hearts too sore for conversation. This was a sorry day for the family, say what hopeful things they might, such as, Chicago was not so far away from Belleville, after all, that Britomart would often be at home, that it was best, and all that; the bitter fact remained, nevertheless, that the mornings would come without the cheerful sound of her voice, that the noon meals would lack their wonted brightness, and the night home-coming from the fields could not be so full of happy anticipation with Britomart away.

Mrs. Landor exercised her feminine prerogative of crying openly and above-board, because she felt like it, and William John envied her. He felt that a good, blubbering cry of four or five minutes' duration, perhaps even less, would ease that aching lump in his throat.

Britomart sat rigid and silent. She could not have expressed her feelings. One moment a great wave of homesickness would sweep over her, and the next she had the sensation of being a soldier going into battle, and going to win. She had a foolish, pleasant fancy of likening herself to Napoleon, although she lacked the qualities which brought him success—namely, utter heartlessness and supreme selfishness; but his fine health, his powers of endurance she had. His tireless, watchful energy, his genius for hard work, she determined to acquire if she had them

not. When homesickness or laziness attacked her she should think of the Little Corporal.

It took all the bolsterings the recollections of that redoubtable warrior could supply to keep the tears back, however, as the train began to move. There they all were, those whose loving faces had been her joy every day of her life, and which she must learn to do without, for many days at least, and in all probability the greater part of the remainder of her life. The last face her eyes rested upon was that of Bumpy, red and wrinkled by an expression of supreme surprise and dismay at the daring of the November wind, which tried, at one fell swoop, to take away his breath as his mother uncovered his face to the farewell gaze of his aunt.

When the last house of Belleville slid out of sight, Britomart settled back and sobbed aloud, despite the fact that Mrs. Lawyer Hamleton occupied the third seat back, and was in the habit of slipping down to Chicago and returning in a day or two without a thought of farewell tears. Presumably, she considered Britomart's distress very childish, especially as she was a tall girl. If she had been small and blonde, those tears might have been excused.

"A pretty Napoleon I am," muttered Britomart. "I wonder what the army of Italy would have thought to have seen the great conqueror starting out for conquest with a red nose and eyes swelled half shut from crying?"

Then she sat up very straight, and tried to

forget how lonely poor William John would be after tea, during the time he usually spent telling her his innocent plans, or reading history aloud while she did the mending, and their father and mother dozed off, too tired to assimilate what was being read; for, much to Britomart's astonishment and delight, William John had fallen in with her conceit of Miss Gridly of Orion, and strictly maintained his allegiance to that mythical person, giving Tilly to understand that, on Miss Gridly's account, her blandishments must be forever in vain; and Tilly, in despair, turned to another hired man, this time minus the double team. Britomart had a sodden fear that in her absence Tilly might renew her attentions with better success; but, however much that troubled her, the hand of Destiny pointed her in another direction.

And in this manner Britomart left the first epoch of her life behind her and went down to Chicago to begin the second, there to meet her share of trials, rebuffs and disillusion.

Paul rented rooms in the rear of a drayman's house on Wells Street. A large, dark room which served for kitchen and dining room, a smaller room, scarcely less dark, serving as the living room, and containing Britomart's rented piano; two bedrooms and a tiny pantry completed the suite. Here Britomart worked and studied for two years, during which time she never once saw the kindly light in her mother's eyes, nor heard the music of her father's laugh.

Sometimes her anxieties nearly overwhelmed her—would have done so quite, had it not been for Dennis Blair; and she always insisted that during that dark time it was Blair's hand, not hers, which held Paul back from despair and ruin. For, oh, the injustice of it all!—the hopelessness which there is no use to describe in detail. We working people know it from bitter experience, and the more favored classes have heard it told so many times that they have become hardened to its repetition. They bow and smile, throw a dime or a dollar to charity now and then, and say, "We know, poor people, you suffer; but be patient. God's will be done!" and pass on to their fetes, their junketings, their politics and their society.

CHAPTER IX.

Meanwhile Britomart was becoming an artist in her profession. She was self-supporting, having secured a few scholars. She even owned a neat black silk dress, which was a necessity, as Professor Seebright was in the habit of making her a conspicuous figure at his recitals, and black silk is more enduring and unnoticeable as a regular costume than the lighter fabrics. It needed few adornments to make Britomart Landor noticeable in any assembly. Her fine height, superb health and unconscious manner marked her as a beauty on the streets of Chicago, Belleville's decision to the contrary notwithstanding.

One night she came swinging home in a quick, easy walk which was one of her charms, carrying music roll and book, an excited flush on her face, aided and abetted by a sharp wind which buffeted her at every corner. She had news for Paul which would astonish him. She hurried through the long, dark alley between two towering brick walls, which led to the door of her home.

It was unusually late—half-past six, and Paul was home, as she discovered on coming abreast the alley window and seeing a light. He had lit the fire and the kettle was singing merrily on the stove.

"Well," cried Britomart, putting her music roll, coat and hat all on the piano stool. "What

do you think, Paul? I'm to beard the lion in his den. I'm to have a pupil among the grandees, and whom do you think! The young cousin of your arch temper-destroyer, Theodore Jeffries!"

Paul was in bad humor. Things had gone wrong and a cut in wages had been declared.

"Don't you take a bit of abuse in that house, Britomart. It's bad enough for me to have to stand their trampling."

Britomart laughed. "I suspect that's how I came to be invited to undertake the task. She is one of Seebright's pupils and, he says, altogether impossible."

"One of the silver-spoon kind who wants to be educated without studying. Don't you accept, Britomart."

"Oh, but I shall. Seebright says it will be a good thing for me pecuniarily—if I can endure it. He says he could not. It appears that Mrs. Jeffries, your Mrs. Jeffries' mother, has great musical ambitions as a vocalist—in fact, is considered a very beautiful singer, and she is extremely anxious that this niece should accompany her with taste upon the piano. But the niece is not fond of music and has become such a trial to Seebright that he has determined, in sheer desperation, to turn her over to me. She is to marry Mr. Theodore Jeffries, so Mr. Seebright tells me."

"You are a fool, Britomart, to undertake any of Seebright's dirty jobs. You have trouble

enough without tackling the Jeffries or their kind."

"Oh, but you know, Paul, it is the Jeffries and their kind who need instruction for their children, and who can afford to pay for it. Now that I am making a success of myself musically, I want a chance to show off."

When Britomart had finished getting supper and had taken her place behind the little tin teapot, Paul produced a letter from home.

"It was sticking in the door," he said, and, in his discouraged tone, Britomart had the key to his depression of spirits.

"No bad news, Paul?"

"Oh, nothing new. Father has been obliged to take up more money to pay for the west fence and the thrashing, and Frank is getting in debt deeper and deeper all the time. What is going to become of us is more than I know."

It was rather a gloomy tea, and Britomart was relieved when a familiar step sounded outside the door and Blair came in. Being a busy man, he was not a frequent visitor, but he brought sunshine when he came, and Britomart felt that they were in need of sunshine.

"Doing!" answered Paul to Blair's question, "about as bad as we can. Letter from home. Everybody a few months nearer the poor house. Father fretting himself to death, and, to cap the climax, our wages were cut in the shops again today. Blair, I don't care what you say, I'm going to quit pretty soon."

"Oh, it isn't so bad," Britomart interposed, a little ashamed of this bag of calamities which Paul was emptying on Blair's devoted head the moment it showed itself in their door. "No, it isn't all bad. I have a new music scholar—Miss Barlow, Mr. Jeffries' cousin and fiancée."

"That's the worst of it all!" growled Paul. "I tell her it is bad enough that that damned brute should lord it over me, without her coming under their thumbs. Britomart, if you dare take any abuse from them, I'll turn you out of doors!"

He was walking the floor excitedly. Britomart laughed good-naturedly.

"You'll be cutting your nose off, young man. If this strike comes on, which you say is unavoidable, you'll have to let me support you until you find work."

"Why, yes, Paul, this may be the means of introducing Miss Landor into the very atmosphere which she needs—where money is so plenty it is in the air, you know; she may absorb it in breathing," joked Blair.

Between them they talked and laughed Paul out of his savage mood.

Nevertheless, when Britomart presented herself before the elegant residence of the Jeffries to make her first struggle with the impossible scholar, she was not in a particularly patient frame of mind. She had been alone in her dingy rooms all the forenoon, doing the drudgery necessary to keep her little home tidy, and her fingers felt stiff and unfitted for their task. The

melancholy home letter and Paul's pending troubles weighed upon her.

So this was the home of the millionaire who had cut the wages in Paul's shop yesterday? A man-servant opened the door and ushered her into a hall which was a revelation to Britomart, so rich, so wide, so warm. Its very luxuriousness angered her. Why not a little less grandeur and poor Paul allowed wages enough for his support!

The servant came back soon and showed her into the library. Miss Barlow was not at liberty just at present to receive her. Britomart settled herself to wait and examine with a jealous eye this further accumulation of riches and luxury. She refused the billowy comfort a great armchair offered, and sat rigidly awaiting her pupil in one of the less comfortable ones by the window. There was no sound save the crackling of the fire in the grate.

This keeping her waiting was an insolence in itself, the insolence of power against her weakness—of wealth against poverty. In effect these plutocrats said to her, "Lie down, you dog, and await our call!" The thought of Paul's impotent anger came to Britomart with added meaning, and a picture of the ones at home—father, mother and the boys, slaving, straining, but unsuccessful, dropping gradually behind in the race, while this man——

Suddenly the great, thick curtain lifted and the man himself was before her. Britomart knew

him immediately from Paul's description. He was a handsome man in face and figure. Yet his good looks were marred, entirely effaced, in the eyes of some, by his manner, which was one of superciliousness and conscious superiority. Through his gold-rimmed glasses his half-closed eyes viewed a world forever at his feet because of his wealth. There was great excuse for him. Even those whose faces were ground by the system which made this man their master, looked upon him with admiration.

Britomart rose as he entered, and the blue eyes met the narrow gray ones in natural antagonism.

"I beg your pardon. Are you waiting for some one?"

"Yes, I have been waiting nearly an hour for Miss Barlow. I am to give her a lesson on the piano."

"Oh, certainly."

He was going.

"Will you be kind enough to tell the young lady that I shall wait no longer?"

Theodore Jeffries turned and eyed the girl coolly.

"It may be worth your while to wait," he said.

The tone was perfectly respectful, but the words so plainly indicated her servitude of poverty and his mastership of money, that, despite Blair's long teaching against hatred for the individual, Britomart, like Paul, felt that this man's debasement and humiliation was all that could

satisfy her. He was plutocracy personified. It was as though the Roman emperor's wish had come true in her case, that the necks of all his kind had become as one, and she longed for the power to smite it. It was not a Christian idea, it was far from a Socialistic idea, but, such as it was, it was Britomart's at that moment.

"No," she answered, with a curl of the lip, "I shall wait no longer. I have business of more importance"; and then, quick as thought, she added, "I am due to read a paper on the subject of strikes before a meeting of Socialists this afternoon."

It was a fabrication from the ground up, but she had been hurt and blindly retaliated with the first poor weapon at her hand, and if she had had the choice of the armory of the world she could not have pierced this millionaire manufacturer more effectually. His face flashed red. Anger fairly scintillated from his narrow eyes.

"Indeed! I might give you a little sound advice if it were worth the trouble, but I do not think I shall. However, we will not detain you from your mission of peace. I beg to assure you that Miss Barlow will not need your services."

But he was reckoning without his host. Miss Barlow had arrived some two minutes before, pushing the great curtain aside noiselessly, and chancing upon what she considered a rich scene; this haughty, handsome young woman facing Cousin Theodore and talking of strikes—work-

ingmen's strikes; the one theme in all the world capable of rousing his fury, as well it might, they being the only stones in his smooth road of power.

"I beg your pardon, Cousin Theodore, but I believe this young lady's business is with me, is it not? Or were you contemplating brushing up a bit in your music?"

The sentence was spoken in a slow, smooth voice, with a peculiar drawl, and ended with a laugh, musical but tantalizing.

Britomart turned, and beheld in Miss Barlow a young lady of, perhaps, twenty, but looking very childish in a white wrapper, with a torrent of black curls tumbling about her head, as though she had but just risen from a nap. Her face was too narrow by far for beauty, and it was dominated by a sleepy pair of black eyes, which she never took the trouble to open to their fullest extent, except upon unusual occasions. Her lips were red—very red, and too full to be in keeping with the rest of her face, had it not been for a strong, firmly shaped and prominent nose, which reconciled one to the voluptuous mouth.

"This young woman has pressing duties, and I have excused her, Clarissa. She says she has been waiting an hour."

"I am so sorry, Miss ——"

Britomart had sent her card, but evidently Miss Barlow had not troubled to remember the

name upon it, and Britomart ignored the intimation that she was to introduce herself again.

"I am so sorry, but I was taking a little rest, and I have told Justine that upon no account is she to waken me when I am sleeping. I had entirely forgotten the lesson. You will pardon me? Good-bye, Cousin Theodore. We will go to the music room, and if a lesson cannot be arranged today, we will make an appointment for it at some future time this week. I am very anxious to begin," and with a touch which was velvet-like, yet compelling, Miss Barlow led Britomart to the music room.

As Britomart's eyes glanced quickly about this apartment she felt her presumption in coming into such a home as instructor. Surely the women of this household were past-mistresses of the art of music. There was a grand piano and a pipe organ. There were guitars in dark, old Spanish wood, with intricate inlaid work on necks and about rosettes. There were mandolins strung picturesquely on the walls; and at the first glimpse, Britomart counted four violins. The room was dark and lofty, the only light coming from a high stained glass window. The floor was bare and polished, and excepting one wide divan against the wall, piled with many cushions, there was no furniture to deaden the sound of instruments.

It seemed as though something of her visitor's thought was apparent to Miss Barlow.

"Sit down a minute. I won't detain you very

long, but I wanted to talk with you alone. This," and she waved her hand to indicate the room, "is all affectation. We are none of us musicians. Aunt Inez sings well, and plays indifferently on the piano and guitar. She wishes me to be able to accompany her upon the piano when she sings; but I tell you frankly, I despise it!"

"Then I advise you to abandon the idea of studying. One must put more or less heart into music if one wishes to master any part of it."

"Oh, but I have decided to try very hard; and before we leave the subject, let us arrange for our first lesson. When can you come again?"

"I can give you a lesson this afternoon. I came for that purpose."

"But your engagement at the Socialist club? Don't tell me that was a fib to aggravate Cousin Theodore!"

Britomart's lip curled in a smile.

"Because," continued Miss Barlow, "it was that which made me wish to know you."

Britomart was very much ashamed of herself and arose to go. Miss Barlow pulled her down upon the divan again.

"Don't go yet. Just a few minutes, please. Then you are not a Socialist?"

"What I told your cousin was not true—that I was to read a paper at a meeting of Socialists."

"And you never attended such a meeting?"

"Many of them, and I am a Socialist. Why should I not be?"

Miss Barlow sat regarding her with those velvety black eyes of hers. "I shall take lessons of you," she said at last; "and I shall make such progress that Aunt Inez will be astonished. Can you come tomorrow to make a beginning?"

"We can make a beginning today, if you are determined to do so with me for a teacher. I advise you to begin now. I may not be admitted to the house tomorrow," and Britomart smiled.

"Cousin Theodore would hardly go that far," said Clarissa; "but he hates you—I could see that."

Miss Barlow's full, red lips were widened in a smile. Her hands lay idly in her lap, palms upward, and Britomart noted how round and firm the little white wrists were, and how rosy the palms and finger tips. She wondered why the fact of the gentleman's hatred for herself should be a matter of gratification to his cousin. If she had been the least bit conceited she might have credited it to jealousy on the part of Miss Barlow, as she remembered that Professor Seebright had told her this young woman was to marry her cousin. Before Britomart left she had promised to come the following day at two o'clock.

In answer to Paul's jealous inquiries in regard to her treatment at the millionaire's house Britomart was very noncommittal. She said she met with very much the reception she had expected, and Paul advised her not to go near

the place again; but the following day found her on the Jeffries' steps, wondering how she would be received this time, and trembling a little in spite of herself. She hoped to be shown at once to the music room, there to await Miss Barlow. She determined to wait in patience if it obliged her to take the last car home at night. To her discomfort she was again shown into the library, which seemed to be quite full of people.

Mr. Jeffries and Clarissa were standing with a young lady, who, to Britomart's bewildered eyes, seemed a most beautiful creature; she was so fragile, so pink-and-white, with a profusion of golden hair and great, pansy-colored eyes. She turned an unsmiling face of curiosity upon Britomart as she entered. She was a charming contrast to Clarissa Barlow, with her unruly braids of black hair and languorous, velvety eyes. Britomart wondered that in the confusion consequent upon her introduction into a roomful of strangers, she should notë that this contrast was to the blonde's disadvantage. It seemed to fade her delicate tints.

Clarissa came forward at once and greeted Britomart with a profusion which astonished that young woman.

"Miss French, let me present Miss Landor. Miss Landor has kindly consented to initiate me into the mysteries of piano music. Can't you find it in your heart to pity her? You remember that duet, one part of which you undertook

to teach me. But, I assure you, Cousin Theodore, I mean to make a great effort. You and Aunt Inez shall be astonished. Aunt Inez, this is Miss Landor, who knows more about music than all of us put together."

A lady rose from beside a little table where she had been serving tea, and coldly gave her hand to Miss Landor. Her eyes, black as Clarissa's own, were of an entirely different expression. They might have been described in the old-fashioned way as "snapping." Her complexion was still good, although again entirely different from her niece's, in that it was highly colored. Her mouth was wide, thin, and, Britomart decided, cruel. She was dressed like a girl of sixteen, and a discerning person could read at a glance that, in her, youth would die hard.

There were two gentlemen near her drinking tea, and Clarissa introduced them as Lord Kildare and Mr. Hawkins. Britomart could not have guessed their ages within twenty years. Both seemed to belong to the class of old-young men to be met with so often in society, a class of which Britomart, with her limited experience, was entirely ignorant; men to whom existing conditions, like a too indulgent mother, had given such a large piece of the pie of the world that it had nauseated them and destroyed an appetite which should still have been keen. Britomart's glance rested but an instant on the scion of English nobility, but in that instant her country-fied, American mind experienced the wonder

invariably present in all American minds under similar circumstances, that a long descent of blue blood should culminate in anything so ugly. The bony, cadaverous face, neither young nor old, the broom-like moustache and prominent ears might well have been the heritage of fifteen generations of hod-carriers. In comparison with the well-built, supercilious Theodore Jeffries, my lord was but an indifferent figure of a man. Britomart resented the hawk-like glance of his eyes, which seemed to consider her from a purely physical standpoint. The glances of the old Chicago roue, Chauncey Hawkins, were no cleaner, perhaps, but at least he had the grace to veil them with a show of respect in the presence of American womanhood, which, even in poverty, in this country, commands it.

A woman with white hair, a rich gown and a disagreeable face, came in, and Clarissa presented Britomart to her Grandmamma Enderby. Then they drank a cup of tea, and, Clarissa excusing herself to her aunt's guests, the two young women repaired to the music room, where the first lesson was soon in progress.

Britomart found her pupil fully up to Professor Seebright's description—impossible.

"You see, it is quite as bad as you have been told, Miss Landor," Clarissa said, with a smile of satisfaction, when they were through.

Britomart made no reply.

"But," continued Clarissa, "I can learn if I

try; and to prove it to you, I'll have this lesson when you come Saturday."

"That is too much to ask. It is too hard a lesson to get in so short a time. It would require constant practice."

"Very well, I will give it all my time. I have nothing else to do, and there is need of great haste in this matter."

The sleepy, velvety eyes were fastened on Britomart with a whimsical expression. "I am well along in years and there is need that my accomplishments be perfected soon."

Britomart hardly knew whether to hate or like this girl. She felt like hating her when she remembered how she had forced her music teacher down the throats of her aunt's guests, and liking her when she remembered that, through her tact, the music teacher had not suffered from the performance. She turned all these things over in her mind during her walk home. She had had a glimpse of fine society and meant to recount it to Paul for his amusement during supper. She had seen a live English lord, and her belief that the nobility was a poor lot was not modified by the encounter.

She met Dennis Blair on her way home. He had been to see Paul, he told her. The strike in the shops was on, and for a time Paul would be idle. "But don't worry," he added; "I have managed to get him a little work in the office, so you will be provided for."

"And I am keeping my pupils," Britomart said with a brave heart.

"Would God I might ease things up a bit for some of the other poor fellows and their families."

Britomart bade him good-night, and hastened home to find Paul in a better humor than she had expected.

"It would have done you good to see them pour out, Bee. Jeffries knew nothing of it when I came away. His old wheels will stand idle for one while, I'm thinking."

He gave an account of the going out, dwelling with especial pleasure on an incident which happened soon after dinner. There had been an objectionable foreman placed over their shop during the last week. He was a Swede who could hardly speak English, and succeeded a man, capable, honest and just alike to employer and laborer. The men were working on piece work, however, and the American had not the slave-driving qualities requisite to squeeze all the company believed might be squeezed out of that particular room for a given amount of wages; consequently, the Swede was put in his place. Before going out, the boys had tied a rope around the Swede's neck and dragged him back and forth until the life was nearly beaten out of him.

"And did you have hold of the rope, Paul?"

Paul hesitated a minute and then frankly admitted that he did. "I tell you, Britomart, my

fingers fairly itched to give the dirty sneak a twist, but I beg of you don't tell Blair; he would disapprove and, Britomart, he is mighty good to us. I should not like to seem ungrateful. And now where have you been and what have you seen today?"

"I have seen," said Britomart, "three great men; one is great because he is titled, one is great because he is rich, and one is great because he cares for others before himself—can feel for others' woes. In short, he is great because he is great."

CHAPTER X.

Britomart was shown into the music room at once on Saturday and found Clarissa curled up among the cushions on the luxurious divan, looking like the favorite of some Eastern prince with her clinging, inky locks and her long, velvety eyes. Her dress was calculated to add to this illusion, being a negligé affair, dropping from her rounded shoulders and disclosing her arms in astonishing glimpses the whole of their graceful length. The material of which the dress was made had a greenish gold background, upon which innumerable brilliant dragon-flies glittered, enmeshed in a silver warp.

Britomart began by hating Miss Barlow because she had evidently donned this gown to bewilder an unsophisticated country girl, not used to such extravagant fashions, but was obliged to like her for the alacrity with which she took her place at the piano and executed the rather difficult first lesson without a break.

After the new lesson had been given Clarissa reeled off from the music stool with a sigh of relief.

"Thank Heaven, that's over!" she said. "And I am an exemplary pupil, am I not, Miss Lander?"

Britomart was obliged to admit that she was delighted.

"And a little bit astonished, isn't it so?"

Britomart laughed good-naturedly. "Oh," she answered, "I knew it was rather from laziness than lack of ability that you failed."

"I beg your pardon, but it wasn't. If I had ability there would be, as Mark Tapley has it, no credit in the affair. It is the fact that I totally lack musical ability, coupled with that of my mastering the lesson, which should bring me credit. I hate it and always shall!"

"You incur the labor then for the sake of pleasing some one else?"

"Yes."

"That, after all, is a worthy motive."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"But you never would guess the name of the person whom I study to please."

"Your aunt?"

"No."

"Your cousin, Mr. Jeffries?"

"No! May heaven strike me dead if ever I do anything to please that man!"

Britomart was shocked and showed it in her face.

"Come, sit down and talk to me a bit. I long for a confidant. I never had but one in the world, and that one, old Betty Barlow by name, is not always reliable. The moment I saw your face I thought, 'I wish that girl were my sister, or some one under obligations to listen to me. You are so big, you know, and—pardon me—so beautiful!'"

Britomart made a scornful gesture of dissent.

"When you know me better, you will appreciate that compliment, because you will know that I never flatter. I am"—and she shrugged her shoulders slightly—"too much given to the other thing. Yes, when I first saw you I liked you, and when I discovered you standing up to Cousin Theodore with your gloves on, so to speak, and realized that you had just 'placed one in the neck'—that is a quotation from Chauncy Hawkins, who is very well informed in matters of the ring—I say, when I saw that, I loved you!"

"Why are you so bitter against your cousin?"

"I am not bitter against him. On the contrary, I believe there are some good traits in him which have never been allowed to show themselves. But I oppose him on principle, because everybody else humors him; Aunt Inez and Grandma Enderby because he is a man; society and the world because he is a rich man. No one in all his life has dared to do anything that is contrary to his will, except your humble servant, and I have had my hands full with my contract. I am having a little respite this week for the first time in my life, on account of the strike. Cousin Theodore's men are out on a strike, and he is raging like a hungry lion in consequence. Of course, they will have to succumb, sooner or later—there is no doubt of it—and it will not damage Theodore's bank account to any great extent, but he is so angry to think the men dare do such a thing. No, I had no inten-

tion of again beginning the study of music when I came down to the library that day, but I am studying it to please—you and no one else!"

She put her two little hands over Britomart's, sitting very close to her on the divan. "And now I want you to do something for me to requite me for this labor of love; will you?"

"I can't tell until I know what it is that you want. I do have a feeling of gratitude towards you, Miss Barlow, for hating your domineering cousin so heartily. Poor Paul! He is one of the sufferers who comes under your cousin's curse."

"And who is Paul? Your sweetheart?"

"He is my brother, and he works for the Jeffries firm."

"Good! Then you will be all the more willing to do what I wish. I want you should, instead of teaching me music, teach me Socialism. Take me with you to your clubs, tell me what books to read."

Britomart laughed derisively. "Your cousin would accuse me of obtaining money under false pretenses. The idea of my taking his money and putting in my time teaching you socialism—it is quite ridiculous."

"Listen to me," commanded Miss Barlow. "You do not understand our domestic arrangements or you would not say you were taking Cousin Theodore's money for my lessons. I will explain, but first I think I will confer a great favor upon you—one I have never granted to

any of my acquaintances before; I will introduce you to Betty Barlow. Would you like that I should?"

Britomart could not very well refuse, and Clarissa immediately led the way into the magnificent hall, up the great stairs, where an army might have ascended without inconvenience, through upper halls, then up another broad flight of stairs, and threw open a door, bidding Britomart enter.

The room was bare save for a long pine table and three chairs. One of them was occupied by an old woman, so shriveled, so bony, so little and bent, that Britomart stopped to consider a moment whether this was a human being or a cunningly contrived automaton made of leather. A pot of paste stood in front of her, and at her right hand a hundred little bottles. She wore a large cap of sheer muslin on her head and a plaid shawl about her shoulders. She glanced up with one eye, like a bird, when her visitors came in, but aside from this slight acknowledgment of their presence she never paused in her monotonous labor. Her bird-like claws grasped and patted and smoothed the labels into place with a dexterity which surprised Britomart.

"Busy as ever, I see, grandma," began Clarissa.

The beady black eyes shot an upward glance at the two and then the flying paste-brush wavered and stopped.

"Who's that, Clary?" demanded the old wo-

man, fixing Britomart with her glance in quite an alarming manner. "Who's that you've got with ye, I say! I thought it was that Satan's cub of an Inez. But she's been here, about three times today already. Hand me them labels, and step off lively, you limb! I ain't got time for visitin'; I've got to work—to work, I can tell ye. Them as belongs to me is mighty fine folks, but where'd they be with their jim-cracks and their fol-de-rols if it wa'n't for old Betty Barlow's work? Where'd they be? Their old grandad Barlow never worked a minute in his life—never a minute, the old limb! Drunk all the time, and screechin' like all the devils in the bad place, and dilirium tremens at last, and that's what took 'im."

"That, you see, was the manner of my great-grandfather's taking off," Clarissa said, her whole face lit up with elfish satisfaction in her great-grandmother's reminiscences.

"Lord!" mumbled that lady, pasting for dear life, and speaking more to herself than for Britomart's benefit. "Many's the time I've gone hungry to bed, and many's the time I've lived on potatoes grown right down there where the factory stands. Now the folks is so fine! So fine!"

"Talk about descent," murmured Clarissá, smiling, "I wonder what Lord Kildare would say to mine? And yet, Miss Landor, he, the scion of a noble house, contemplates marriage with me—that is, would, if he only knew which of my

grandmothers would die first. He has never, by the way, met Mrs. Barlow. I wish he might! I wish he might!"

"What?" demanded the old woman, who, with an upward tilt of an eye had seen the words she could not hear.

"I did not say anything, grannie;" and, then, to Britomart, "There's more, oh, so much more family history. She'll get to it, give her time. Poor old Betty. Her predilections for reminiscences is the real reason she's not tolerated below stairs. A stroke of paralysis which deprived her of the use of her lower limbs years ago is the reason given to the public."

"Tom Enderby, that married Hetty, was lazy enough, but he managed my money, though. He built the factory. But his girls was limbs. Dang 'em! I hate 'em. One of 'em married Jack Barlow, her own cousin, and the other one, Ben Jeffries. She was the worst of the lot—that Inez!" The old woman fairly trembled with rage and the paste-brush zigzagged through the air. "She's the worst of 'em all, the worst, of 'em all; with her fol-de-rols and her gewgaws. She's a limb of old Satan; I hate her. If I had my legs I'd go down an' screech at her in the front yard. I'd go in the streets an' tell everybody who come along all about 'er!"

Clarissa laughed in glee. "What about the other girl, Clarissa—my mother?" she asked the old woman, but that personage insisted on keeping to her text.

"Inez was the worst o' the lot. I hate 'er!"

"I know, I know, grannie, she's bad enough; but so am I."

"You are like Clarissa, your mother. She was bad enough, but not so bad as Inez. Dang 'er, I hate 'er! She can spend the money and Het lets her; she and her boy, with their fol-de-rols and their gewgaws. Her boy'll find out who the factory belongs to, and who the city lots belongs to! They're all Betty Barlow's. They was old drunken Barlow's, and now they're his widow's, and I'm his widow. Hand me some more labels and tell the boy to come and take the bottles away. Step lively!"

"But, grannie, what of Clarissa Enderby, my mother?"

"She married Jack Barlow, her cousin. His hair was as red as a fox's tail, and he got mighty proud on account of his money—mighty proud."

"And after she married her cousin?"

"Eh?" asked the old woman, with a cunning leer.

"Afterwards, afterwards, grannie."

"Oh, she ran away with one of the factory hands, a gipsy named Melton, with hair black as night. She staid away three years and came back with a baby with black hair like his—like Melton's. She came back a'most starved, and they hushed it up, and folks thought she had been across the water for her health." Here the old woman lost the thread of her story and broke into a senile cackle.

"Go on, grannie. What happened then?"

"Oh, I don't know. They all died—that is, Jack Barlow and Clarissa—all but that little black young one. That lived and Jack Barlow had said 'twas his—it wasn't, it was Melton's—and Het Enderby took care of it, but she hated it, and that limb of an Inez hates it, and her boy hates it; but it's here and alive, and—why, it's you!" added the old woman, gleaming across at Clarissa, who in turn contemplated her great-grandmother with a soft smile of satisfaction parting her full lips.

"You see how it is, Miss Landor—that Clarissa Melton is nearer the people—the toilers—than even Clarissa Barlow would have been. Jack Barlow was one generation removed from hard necessity, but Melton (first name unknown) was a factory hand." Clarissa beat a rapid tattoo with her rosy finger-tips on her grandmother's table. "You see, the start of this fortune came from buying swamp land, from which to gather simples which Grandma Barlow made into medicines and bottled for market. She still imagines she makes her living by the old industry. These bottles are taken to the kitchen, the labels washed off and then returned to be relabeled by these tireless old talons. It keeps Betty Barlow quiet, and that is the end and aim of this household—to keep Betty Barlow quiet, with her reminiscences, her jim-cracks and fol-de-rols. It's a pity isn't it, civilization will not allow us to dispose of the aged and useless mem-

bers of society in a reasonable manner, as the Esquimaux do. But it doesn't countenance such proceedings, and here is old Betty Barlow hanging on far beyond the allotted time of mankind to the disarrangement of the plans of the entire family. By all good rights she should have laid aside her paste-brush fifteen years ago and died, leaving her property in its entirety to her only daughter, Henrietta Enderby, and her heirs forever. Then Henrietta Enderby, my dear grandmother, could have made a will giving the money where she considers it belongs, into the hands of Aunt Inez, who would, eventually, hand it over to Cousin Theodore, with perhaps a small allowance for Clarissa Melton Barlow, the gipsy, who crept into the family in a manner which to declare to the world would bring disgrace on all the clan, yet who, as Jack Barlow's legitimate daughter and Clarissa Enderby's heir, will come in for Clarissa Enderby's half of old Betty Barlow's money, which is all the money in the family. You see the complications growing out of the circumstances. Grandma Enderby's health is delicate. If she should die before old Betty Barlow, I would come in for half the fortune in spite of everything. This would never do. The fortune must remain intact. In order to insure this Cousin Theodore stands ready to marry me in the face of the fact that he is desperately in love with Hilda French, the blonde girl to whom I introduced you the other day. He isn't just sure of my consent, but believes that in such an im-

portant matter I will listen to reason. Meanwhile Shelly Kildare, that scion of English aristocracy, getting an inkling at the club of my American million or so in his depleted old pockets, hovers about us like a bird of prey. He knows the components in the affair are a girl, a few millions, and two grandmothers, but he is uncertain just how they are combined. Of course, he doesn't wish to make a mistake and carry home a penniless American as his wife; that is never done; so he flutters now near, now far away. If Betty Barlow dies Cousin Theodore would be only too glad to have the lord take me off his hands; he would even be willing to throw in a handsome dowry. But if Betty Barlow outlives his grandmother he does not propose to throw in the half of the money. You see how embarrassing it is."

"Eh?" ejaculated the old woman, so suddenly that it startled Britomart. "They died, both on 'em. Maybe it was poison, and maybe 'twas suicide, I don't know. But Jack Barlow had red hair, I know that, and got mighty high afore he died, with his jim-cracks and his fol-de-rols."

Clarissa rose to go. "Good-bye, grannie," she said, and kissed her on her leathery old forehead.

"Go 'long with ye," snapped the old woman. "Don't come a-nigh me!"

"Now, that's something new—that murder and suicide idea. I must question Betty about that. There is always something new. She is a most versatile entertainer, but, like a parrot,

she shuts up now and then and no amount of force or persuasion can make her talk. Surrounded as I am with such relatives and friends, you can understand my want of diversion—that I should wish to become a Socialist—to do something red-handed.”

“But socialism is not in that line,” smiled Britomart. “Socialism is an adjustment of uneven conditions. For instance, here is your superabundance of money making you all miserable, just as my family’s lack of it is making them all miserable, yet we are helpless to mend matters in the present state of society. Money has certainly been the root of all evil in your family.”

“I cheerfully admit it,” said Clarissa.

“What we Socialists are striving for is an arrangement which would make it impossible for such men as your cousin, Mr. Jeffries, to accumulate such a burden of filthy lucre that it would crush him and his friends into the mire of infamy—to make it necessary for them to spend their splendid energies in some work which would benefit the race, instead of scheming and planning to no better end than to keep their crushing load intact; on the other hand, to give such men as my father and brothers, and Melton (“First name unknown,” muttered Clarissa) a just compensation for their labor.”

“I know now the meaning of that strange thrill that shot through my being when I first heard the word ‘Socialism.’ It was my father’s blood

stirring in me, the blood of that factory hand. I see by your face, Miss Landor, that you wonder at my pride in my father, or that I am willing to mention him at all under the circumstances; but do you know, ever since Betty Barlow disclosed to me the family skeleton in the shape of this scandal about my father and mother, I've had a tender feeling for him; in fact, he is the only one among my relatives about whom there is a doubt, and I am willing and anxious to give him the benefit of the doubt. You have heard, yourself, from old Betty Barlow, that my great-grandfather was a reprobate; Betty—you can readily see that Betty was no saint; my grandmother Enderby I detest, because she is one of these crawling, quiet, persistent women, with no idea whatever of principle; Aunt Inez is just what my mother must have been, a bundle of shallow selfishness. Poor Theodore! What can the world demand of a man with such forebears? The only thing I have to thank my mother for is that, instead of strengthening the strain of Barlow blood in me, she gave me for a father the proletary, the factory hand, Melton, whose first name is a blank in Betty Barlow's old brain. Don't try to argue me out of my respectful love for my father, Miss Landor. I repeat, he is the only one regarding whom there is a doubt of his utter worthlessness.

"I like to think of Melton in this way: He was poor. He worked hard for the pittance doled out to him by his paymaster, overbearing,

red-headed, purse-proud Jack Barlow. He saw Barlow's wife; she was like Aunt Inez, I assume, handsome, in a certain way, but thoroughly selfish—to be touched by nothing save flattery. He knew her to be the source of Jack Barlow's wealth and pride, and, hating the whole Barlow tribe, longing for revenge, he became conscious of his power over the woman. (He was a fine figure of a man, this nameless father of mine; of that I am certain.) He exercised that power to the uttermost and carried her away, together with enough Barlow dollars to make them comfortable. She was a vixen, of course—Aunt Inez is—she drove him to drink and at last deserted him, taking with her the little being he loved better than life itself. She came back to the fiery Jack Barlow, and from what I gathered from Betty's nonsense this morning there was a tragedy of some sort, a further blemish on the family history which must be kept hidden at all hazards.

"I never had an inkling of this before. This is one of the peculiarities which makes Betty so interesting to me. Her memory is like a haunted castle, where rats run through many apartments and the wind howls about the turrets. Every day some new room, containing old relics, is discovered by the investigator, more grotesque, more shuddery, than the rest. Aunt Inez says the tales are the vagaries of an unhinged mind, but I know better; I know they are all as true as gospel. When one of those long-closed compartments are opened the contents become com-

mon property, and she repeats them over and over again without a change in a single detail. But there are still undiscovered compartments, filled with mysterious reminiscences, which I must possess myself of before Betty pays the debt of nature. Perhaps I may even recover, stowed away in a bale or barrel, that mislaid first name of Melton's."

Clarissa took Britomart to her room and made tea there, brewing and pouring with those exquisite hands, while the low, deliberate voice recounted the dark chapters of the family history. Britomart found her charming. When Clarissa set about it she could win one completely. She seldom cared to do so, and usually preferred people to hate and fear, rather than love her; but this stately music teacher, country girl, Socialist, pleased her from the first, and she strove for her friendship with all the arts of which she was the mistress. Britomart never fawned upon her, never seemed to be currying favor for her own ends, and this pleased Clarissa. She had no wish to act the patroness to the music teacher; she was hungry for a friend—a confidant, something she had never possessed in all her luxurious life.

"Take pity on me, dear Britomart," she said to her one day; "think how little affection is mine in this dreary world. My grandmother and aunt hate me for an upstart; Theodore is worse than all because, hating me, he still intends to marry me merely on account of the money.

Betty Barlow is really the kindest I have, and Betty, you understand, is erratic in her affections."

Britomart resisted the girl's pleadings to be allowed to accompany her to the meetings of the Socialists. She told Blair of Clarissa's desire to see and know more of the workings of the clubs.

"Bring her," said Blair. "Educate her. Who knows? She may prove worth it."

"Yes," sneered Paul, "do it, Britomart. It would be gratifying to think of his high-mightiness, Jeffries, being obliged to acknowledge his wife a Socialist."

Paul was very bitter against Jeffries. When the shops resumed work he was discharged unconditionally, because his hand had been on the rope in the foreman affair. He was living on his sister's earnings, and the fact galled him. Every day he walked the streets looking for work, at first patiently, then bitterly, then revengefully. His was not a nature to gain knowledge in adversity. He possessed a bad instinct—that of the anarchist, to be revenged, to blow up, to annihilate. It took the combined efforts of Blair and Britomart to keep Paul within bounds those days. Blair considered it providential that Britomart was in the city. "'Britomart' is the charm-word that keeps him from ruin," Blair said, smiling at her, "but think of the poor lads, ignorant and vicious, who have no word, no inspiration; feeling the heavy heel of the oppressor, turning like a writhing worm, but

knowing not where to strike, with the power in their own hands to change it all if only they can be brought to understand. Missionaries! I tell you, Miss Britomart, God calls aloud for missionaries to enlighten the people!"

CHAPTER XI.

Very much to Mrs. Jeffries' surprise and gratification, her niece requested to be allowed to entertain their friends with a musicale, the entertainment to consist principally of solos by Mrs. Jeffries, with Miss Landor as accompanist: Clarissa proposed to take the responsibility of the affair entirely upon herself and no one knew better than Inez Jeffries how well her prospective daughter-in-law could do such things when she chose. They made out the list of names together and Mrs. Jeffries graciously proposed to leave out that of Hilda French. She knew of Theodore's preference for the pretty blonde and believed there must, of course, be a rankling jealousy in Clarissa's heart on that account. It was almost a certainty now that Theodore would marry his cousin. Mrs. Enderby's health was growing extremely delicate, and the animated little parcel of bones upstairs, busily labeling bottles, seemed to have a new lease of life. Like Riley's Grandfather Squeers, she had "rounded her three score and ten, had the hang of it now, and could go it again."

Inez disliked her niece on her own and again on Theodore's account. Poor boy! Obligated to marry the little imp! If Grannie Barlow would only die it could all be arranged so nicely. Lord Kildare was anxious to take Clarissa off their hands, thereby adding by his title a new luster

to the family name. Theodore could then be sure of all the Barlow fortune, and Hilda French would make him a charming wife. Mrs. Inez had plans of her own in the matrimonial line. Mr. Chauncey Hawkins was a frequent and welcome visitor at the Jeffries mansion, and although Mrs. Jeffries was quite certain Theodore never mistrusted such a state of affairs, and would have disapproved emphatically if he had, Mr. Hawkins' attentions to the black-eyed widow were at times quite lover-like. Mrs. Jeffries was flattered by these attentions. Chauncey Hawkins, although prematurely aged by a dissolute life, was a man of fashion, a bachelor, ever welcome in the most exclusive drawing rooms in the city. He had no money—that is, none to speak of—but he could dance divinely, and always dressed correctly, and never, on any occasion, appeared, or acted, in a manner which his worst enemy could construe as bad form. That is, in society. Mrs. Jeffries had heard whispers of some of his doings which possessed no form whatever, other than that of him of the horns and hoofs, but Mrs. Jeffries was fashionably lenient in such matters. "Men would be men," she soliloquized, by which she meant that men would be beasts. As for money, if Grandma Barlow would only die, and then—well, should the money come to her before it went to Theodore, she would have her day, at least, before she passed it on; and there was plenty for all.

Britomart donned her black silk in a good deal of a tremor on the eventful night. When she was ready Paul and Blair both declared she was a picture. She tried to smile, but there was a lump in her throat as she thought of poor Paul struggling with the demon of the unemployed. She would not let him accompany her, but begged Blair to spend the evening with him.

"You may come for me at twelve, Paul," she said, "but I will take a car now and be there in no time. I am not afraid so early in the evening."

The fact was that in her brother's present frame of mind she felt that he was safer at home with Blair than wandering about until such time as she should be at liberty to go home. She never left him alone evenings if it were possible to avoid it. It would have been a necessity to-night had Blair not happened in, for Clarissa had intimated that this night's work might be the means of introducing her into a new and lucrative field of employment; in short, that she, Clarissa, had undertaken to make her the fashion.

"It may not last," she warned, "but there is money in it while it does. You will be asked to assist at other musicals; and when you are, don't be afraid to ask a price for your services. They will think all the more of you. In our set things are not judged by their actual worth, but by what they represent in money values. I shall slyly circulate the report that your services come high—

that not every one could afford to avail themselves of such talent, and, believe me, you will have business. But don't lay me in the lie by being modest. Mind, this pinnacle cannot be reached by hard work, nor by ability; it can only be reached by becoming the fashion, and I mean, for awhile at least, to make you the fashion."

Britomart was painfully early. She had not realized how early until the servant conducted her from the dressing room into the brilliantly lighted parlors where, as yet, no guests had assembled. The music room was now one with the library, and the piano, banked with flowers whose heavy perfume hung in the warm air, was pulled into a conspicuous place ready for the evening's entertainment. Clarissa was nowhere to be seen, and Britomart shrank from becoming the target for the eyes of each succeeding bevy of guests as they arrived. She approached the piano and ran her fingers softly over the keys, "just to get the feel of them," as she expressed it. She felt wretched and out of place, and for the life of her she couldn't keep the picture of poor, dejected Paul out of her mind. When she thought of him the pitying tears sprang to her eyes and the lump in her throat became painful. But that would never do. Tears at this critical moment might ruin everything. Clarissa had said her queenly carriage and fresh complexion would do much for her, and instead of weeping for Paul she must work for Paul. She must help amuse these blase people, who pos-

sessed so much of this world's good things that they were dying of the fatigue of enjoyment, and spent their lives hunting for something to give them new sensations; no matter whether a French dancer or a religious enthusiast, a painter or a massagist, a saint or a mountebank. Britomart, still touching the keys, looked over her shoulder at the beautiful rooms full of soft light and the perfume of flowers, and into the reception hall, out of which rose the great polished staircase, where presently appeared the two cousins, side by side; Jeffries so stately, so handsome, and Clarissa, so bewitching that Britomart caught her breath. Ah! why was it not true that beauty and goodness were closely allied? Why was there not room in that big, handsome body of his for a great heart; one to feel the needs of the world, an unselfish heart? "There is, there is!" Blair would have assured her. "It is the cursed system of private capitalism which has ruined the man's soul. Do not condemn him. He, even more than Paul, is a victim. Manliness, philanthropy, are dead within him, and their places are filled by baseless pride and lust of gain. What greater calamity can a man suffer!" Jeffries, looking down upon the girl at the piano, thought, "A fine-looking girl, but a fool. Pity she can't rid herself of that Socialistic bee she has in her bonnet and go about her business as a woman should, asking no questions." Clarissa advanced with effusion and kissed Britomart on the lips. It was not like her. She was

never demonstrative, and Britomart knew the kiss was given to annoy Mr. Jeffries.

"Come upstairs, dear, I want to loan you a diamond for your hair and a bit of real lace for the front of your gown." Britomart protested. "But you must," persisted Clarissa. "Surely you do not want to be accused of parsimony, and a young woman who receives such magnificent remuneration for her services can afford a little quiet elegance."

"The jewel of contentment which Miss Landor undoubtedly possesses is, after all, the more becoming," said Mr. Jeffries, in a manner which Britomart might have construed as complimentary.

"But I do not possess it," answered Britomart, and then was angry at herself because she had again taken up the foils against this man. Her forte was not argument, she lacked the coolness necessary for success. She determined not to open her lips again, no matter what he said. Clarissa leaned against the piano, her red lips widened in an expectant smile. She hoped for a battle. There was time before the guests would arrive. The dark wood of the instrument and the white of her gown together brought out all the rich tints of her face, the dusky splendor of her hair and eyes.

"You are not contented?" questioned Theodore. "You should be; you have youth, health and—pardon me—beauty."

"You flatter me."

"I do not, I assure you."

"Then let me return the compliment in kind. You yourself possess the attributes you so kindly acknowledge are mine—namely, youth, health and good looks; but you have something more."

"You refer to——"

"Your wealth, certainly. You did not mince matters in your summing up of my advantages, why should I in speaking of yours? You have the power to dictate to a number of your fellow-men whether they shall live or not. You have the opportunity, by reason of wealth accumulated through the toil of others before you were born, to say to men: 'You must not think your own thoughts, but mine; you must not vote for your candidate, but mine; you must not dare even to resent an insult received in my employ.' You have the power to do and say all this, by reason of your wealth. In short, you are a god, who controls not only men's bodies, but their souls."

Jeffries made a gesture of impatience. He had not meant to argue with this pretty woman; it was beneath his dignity. He had intended only to browbeat her a little, but she had succeeded in angering him. She had said—as she always managed to say—the thing which maddened him. This ceaseless whining for rights, rights, rights, from workmen and from women, was sickening.

Clarissa, leaning in silence against the piano, showing only by her smile how much she en-

joyed the encounter, should have been clothed in a red domino, sported a single red feather in her cap and disclosed a cloven hoof, so Mephistophelan was her expression and attitude.

A red flush shot across Jeffries' cheeks and nose, showing his anger.

"These are, of course, the sophistries of Socialism. I have heard all this before, and it is to be deplored that intelligent people give it room in their thoughts for a moment. It is on a par with spiritual manifestations. Every generation a new set of zealots search for signs from the spirit world, while their counterparts dream of Utopia; both fruitless—unavailing. My dear Miss Landor, this went on generations before you and I were born, it will go on when our bones are dust and our names forgotten. No nearer accomplishment than a thousand years ago. It reminds me of the ceaseless beat of the waves on a rock-bound shore. They advance savagely, resistlessly, to tear away the eternal rocks, only to fall back in defeat, to growl and gather for another despairing attack. This drama was enacted when the world was young; it will be repeated when she shrinks to nothingness with age."

"If this be true, God help the race he has created!" murmured Britomart, solemnly. At that moment her faith was weak. She felt that Jeffries was right, and Dennis Blair, with his optimistic reading of the signs of the times, was

being led astray by the ardent longings of a generous heart.

Clarissa, uncoiling herself and drawing Britomart away, fixed her black eyes on her cousin and softly said: "The waves beating on the rocks may not visibly affect them, but at times they engulf individuals; isn't it so, Cousin Theodore?"

"I don't know what you mean," snapped Theodore, still warm from his own eloquence.

"Oh, I was thinking of that funny fellow whom we saw washed from the rocks at Old Point Comfort last summer. I can't understand your social questions, your jim-cracks and fol-de-rols, as our relative would say."

"See that you do not try, little girl," Theodore answered. "It would be better for civilization if people worked more and dreamed less."

"Yes, yes; he is right," assented Clarissa; "more good, hard work and less jim-cracks and fol-de-rols, is what the people need," and she smothered an impudent little laugh in a pink palm.

Theodore could neither understand nor forgive her in these moods. He felt that nothing would do him so much good as to resort to the old-fashioned manner of disciplining wives and sweethearts and give her a whipping. A moment ago he had thought her charming, now she was mocking him for the benefit of this audacious young music teacher.

"It is not always the working people," he re-

torted, angrily; "this is the strange part of it. Look at Barring, a millionaire in his own right, and mad as a March hare on the subject of equality."

"You will see him tonight," Clarissa murmured in Britomart's ear.

"Of whom are you talking?" asked Britomart.

"This mad March hare, worth a million, yet yearning for equality among men—James Barring."

They were mounting the stairs, and Britomart imagined Clarissa's tongue lingered lovingly on the name. She jumped at the conclusion that she had solved the mystery of Clarissa's wish to know more about Socialism. It was partly to spite her cousin, but more especially to please this rich young Socialist with whom she was in love.

"James Barring, you say? There must be good in him—oh, much good in him, if, blinded by millions, he can yet see truth and justice, Miss Barlow. I know I shall admire this man."

"You shall see him tonight," reiterated Clarissa, still in that preoccupied, dreamy fashion which a girl falls into when speaking of the man she loves.

"She loves, but is not sure of his love for her," decided Britomart, and a thrill of affection for this erratic young woman stirred in her. "If she has sense and heart enough to care for a man who has sense and heart enough to care for his fellowmen, there is something lovable about her

after all." Impulsively she stooped and placed a kiss as light as air on the creamy shoulder rising from Clarissa's white gown. A flash of red shot into the girl's face. Britomart might have believed it a flush of pleasure had it not been for the analytical stare with which Clarissa was regarding her.

"Why did you do that, Britomart?" she asked in a tone of curiosity.

"It was for the Socialist," - said Britomart, laughing.

When they went down again the rooms were already filling with a glittering, chattering company. Clarissa's eyes scanned the crowd rapidly. She must perform her part of hostess, and she was not willing to leave Britomart stranded on the tender mercies of the soft-voiced women around her. She knew what their attitude would be toward an unknown young woman in a black silk, despite the diamond and bit of real lace.

"Oh, Mr. Barring!" she said, discovering the one for whom she had been looking, "I want to introduce you to another mad March hare. Britomart, this is Mr. Barring, whose political shortcomings Cousin Theodore described to you a few moments ago. Miss Landor, Mr. Barring. His ideas about 'classes and masses,' equal distribution, and so on, are wild enough to suit even you, I think. By the way, Mr. Barring, I have something which belongs to you—was left in my keeping for you. Some day it shall be yours."

She slyly touched the shoulder Britomart had kissed with the tip of her fan, and Britomart, understanding, laughed and blushed; and, laughing and blushing, looked up into the calm grey eyes of the millionaire, who was a Socialist, finding herself on easy terms of friendship at once. He found a retired seat for her, and they talked until Clarissa came to tell Britomart she was wanted at the piano.

Miss Barlow had done her work well. Admiring eyes followed Miss Landor as her queenly head bent above the white keys which her supple fingers manipulated so skillfully. Mrs. Jeffries sang, and feminine heads leaned toward each other and whispers, like soft breezes, floated about the room. Inez believed the whisperings were of her, but they were not. They were of the beautiful young pianist, who already commanded fabulous prices for her services, who was a phenomenon it would be well to cultivate. She harbored queer beliefs, it was whispered. She was of Russian descent and at heart a nihilist, a reformer, an anarchist, and above all, she did not believe in God. Poor Britomart would have been horrified had she ever known what a career Clarissa had attributed to her, plain, Methodistical little country girl that she was; but she would have been delighted to the point of grateful tears could she have read the resolutions in a score of fashionable breasts to secure her services in their own homes at no matter what price. There was a flattering hush when she played

alone. Without her knowledge her star of fortune had arisen within the hour; even while in her heart she was saying, "Oh, how unhappy I am! How wretched! It is no use my trying, nor Paul's trying, nor any one's trying. Success does not come through hard work nor honesty. It comes through wealth alone. And Theodore Jeffries was right. Our strivings are like the waves of the sea, ever beating, beating, yet being in the end beaten. How wretched it all is, and how I hate these ogling women, the impudent young ones the most. And that blonde one, Hilda French with her aristocratic china-blue eyes, I hate more than all the rest. I cannot be a Christian and hate people so. I have my own vagaries; I, too, would like to be 'freaky' and inconsistent, but in me it would not be tolerated; but Clarissa Barlow—what may she not do and be forgiven, even though it is but the shadow of a fortune which hovers above her. She may tantalize as she will, may sulk, or sneer, she will be loved—is loved—I know it—by James Barring, a millionaire, and, I believe, a gentleman in every sense of the word. What kind eyes, and his wide, handsome mouth! It will never speak an angry word to the women who loves him. I wonder how it would seem to be kissed by such a mouth. Oh, shame! What am I thinking? God help me to put such silly thoughts out of my head and keep them out. I am John Lander's daughter, trying to make a decent living in this hard city. My brother is a mechanic out of

employment and depending upon my fitful earnings to tide him over. This is the only respectable dress I have, and it is breaking under the arms a little. The rent is due—God help me to play well!—God help me to play well!”

One woman was whispering to her neighbor that she could see very well why the girl was a success. It was because she threw her whole soul into the interpretation of the composer's thought, that she was absorbed by his conception of the theme—one could read it in her face. Another murmured that she was very interesting despite her disbelief in a Divine Providence. When Britomart's fingers fell from the keys and she rose she was startled by a wave of genuine applause.

“Fine-looking girl,” meekly suggested Mr. Hawkins, as he stood beside Mrs. Jeffries in a far corner.

“Do you think so, really?” asked the lady, with a jerky motion of the shoulders which corresponded with her “snapping” eyes. “Too large and ungainly.”

“She is large,” qualified Mr. Hawkins; “but, dear Mrs. Jeffries, you know my penchant for dark-haired women. I can forgive a dark-haired woman any shortcoming.” And Mrs. Jeffries simpered and declared him incorrigible.

“If any ask you for your services,” whispered Clarissa, “send them to me. You must not let them come to your home and discover that you do your own work; that would ruin everything.

Mystery, mystery—that will fetch them. Your fortune is assured, my dear. You'll get their shekels, and you really did play well—too well, for dear Aunt Inez' song."

CHAPTER XII.

Although the musicale could not be voted other than a success from every point of view, there was a feeling of storm present at the Jeffries' breakfast table next morning. In the first place Clarissa was late, and this always angered Grandma Enderby. Mrs. Jeffries was in ill-temper because she felt that Mrs. Jeffries, the soloist, had been overshadowed by Miss Landor, the accompanist.

"Hasn't Clarissa come down yet?" she asked of Theodore, who stood in the window looking over the morning paper for allusions to the late strike. "She takes her time, surely. I pity you, Theodore, when that girl is your wife."

Theodore was not in a mood to accept pity with any degree of composure. He was out of patience with Clarissa for being in his way, with Hilda French for flirting with Lord Kildare—with the world in general.

"Please reserve your pity. At least I am not in need of it at present. How is Grandma Barlow this morning? Have you been up?"

"Oh, no; but I sent Justine. She is well, very well, indeed."

Grandma Enderby sighed. "I wish I were as strong," she said; "I spent a wretched night—no sleep whatever."

Mrs. Enderby was a pale old woman, with snow-white hair and a weak face. The strong

character which was a family trait, showing itself in differing and not always pleasing individualities, seemed to have skipped her entirely, leaving a blank. She had been as wax in the hands of her impish mother, her black-eyed, energetic daughter and her handsome grandson.

The family gathered at the table and the servant brought the coffee as Clarissa entered. She wore the Japanese lounging dress with the dragon-flies darting through its silver meshes. This gown was a favorite of hers. She was the only member of the family who showed no signs that the preceding evening had been a fatiguing one. Mrs. Enderby had collapsed into a sickly, wilted heap in her chair, but at Clarissa's entrance she revived in order to give her granddaughter a rating for being late to breakfast."

"So sorry, grandma."

Her words belied her. She was the personification of smiling indifference.

"Good morning, Cousin Theodore. I have just been up to see dear old Betty Barlow, and do you know, she has been telling me the funniest things."

"While we sat here waiting breakfast!" snapped Mrs. Jeffries.

"Hasn't ours been a queer family history, Theodore?"

"If one cares to listen to the ravings of an old woman who has been bereft of her senses for years," snapped Mrs. Jeffries.

"O, I do not consider that Betty Barlow is

bereft of her senses by any means. She is very bright for one of her years, very bright indeed. I wish it were possible for her to get down stairs and see more visitors. I think it would be beneficial. One is apt to become gloomy, shut up always in two rooms. Don't you think it could be managed, grandma?"

"You are talking nonsense, and you know it," said Mrs. Jeffries.

"Of course she is," assented Mrs. Enderby.

"I am not talking nonsense. I enjoy my grandmother's society very much, and I take it for granted others would; I know they would."

Theodore maintained a sulky silence. He feared it would be his turn soon.

"And how is business, Cousin Theodore?"

It had come.

"Good, thank you."

"And the strike is over."

"Entirely."

"And all the men back to work?"

"All who deserve to be back."

"Then there were some who did not deserve to be taken back?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Oh, about four hundred."

"Which means you did not take back many of your old men."

"I said those who deserved it."

"I wish I owned a big factory; I do so like the feel of power. It must be splendid to know

that by a wave of your hand men must lie idle and women starve."

"My dear little cousin, you are talking about something you know nothing of. I fear you are associating too much with the discontents of the working classes for your own good. It is well enough to be charitable, but do not take your proteges to your arms with quite so much fervor?"

"Of whom do you speak—Betty Barlow? She is the only discontented working individual with whom I am in the habit of associating, and she, although hard working, is not so discontented either, unless she is made to wait for paste; then she gets impatient. 'With their jim-cracks and their fol-de-rols,'" she added in a reminiscent chuckle. "Yes, I do wish I owned a factory."

"Very well; let me present you with mine."

"Thanks. You mean with Betty Barlow's. But that is only a question of time, I presume. Then you really give it to me? But do you think that I, being a woman, can oversee the business as I ought?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Very well, then, the first move I shall make will be to reinstall Paul Landor. I will give him a foreman's place, if you please."

Theodore rose with a jerk.

"That's the most pestilential fellow a man was ever cursed by employing. Damn him! I could see him burned at the stake! He has stirred up

more trouble through the means of a friend and abettor of his with a few more brains!"

"Calm yourself, Cousin Theodore. Of course you will be relieved of all responsibility in regard to him, as it will be I who hire him as foreman in my factory."

"I should be willing to humor you, Clarissa, to almost any extent; but——"

"Not to anything I really desire. Yes, that is the way I have always been humored. I am a spoiled child. I've been humored that way, to everything other people want, until I am really spoiled. Oh, well, no matter. Then you absolutely refuse to take the young man on as a foreman?"

Theodore answered that he most certainly did.

"I am very much interested in him," murmured Clarissa, as though to herself. "He is very handsome."

A look of apprehension sprang to Mrs. Jeffries' eyes. She remembered Melton.

"Don't talk silly, Clarissa," she said.

"I am not talking silly, auntie; it is true, he is very handsome, with his manly figure and finely chiseled face. His sister is a great friend of mine. If you will excuse me, I think I will run upstairs and get ready. Hilda French is to call for me and we are going for an early shopping tour this morning. This afternoon I am to drive with Lord Kildare."

When the girl had gone Theodore said to his mother: "Why do you allow her to go driving

with Lord Kildare alone? He would not propose such a thing to a respectable young girl in his own country."

Mrs. Jeffries threw out her hands, palms upwards. "Let her! Let her!" she exclaimed, angrily. "I should like to see you prevent her if she takes a notion."

"She will probably live to see the day she will be prevented from doing the things she has no business to do."

"You mustn't blame your mother, Theodore. Clarissa has bad blood in her."

"She reminds me every day of that perverse old ancestor of hers upstairs."

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Enderby, "she's like mother in a good many ways."

"I wish to goodness, Theodore, if you intend marrying the girl, you would do so soon, and take her off my hands."

Theodore paced gloomily up and down the floor. "She may not be willing to marry me. Who can say? She certainly bears me no particular love, or she would not embrace every opportunity to exasperate me."

"She is not in the dark with regard to your intentions," said Mrs. Jeffries."

"She isn't? By Jove! she's more enlightened than I am, then, for I'm sure I'm frightfully in the dark regarding them," and Theodore laughed at his joke. "And that's the solemn truth," he said to himself, as he went down the steps a few moments later. "I don't know what I want;

whether Clarissa and all my grandmother's money, or Hilda—dear little Hilda—and half the fortune."

When he returned to lunch, however, his mother met him with a grave face. Mrs. Enderby had suffered one of her attacks during the forenoon, and was even then gasping for breath on her bed in her own room.

"I tell you, Theodore, mother is not long for this world, and Grandma Barlow bids fair to outlive us all. The sooner things are settled between you and Clarissa the better. It's going to be a necessity, I can see, poor fellow."

It was hard. That very morning he had met Hilda on the street, and looking down into her blue eyes had almost decided to be content with a million and marry the woman he loved. But two hours in the office at the works, and this announcement of his grandmother's illness had their effect, and he promised his mother that he would formally ask his cousin's hand in marriage before the day ended. A fortune cut in two was almost worse than no fortune in the present crisis. To divide the fortune meant to weaken its power.

His mother left the room to send Clarissa to him. He dreaded this interview. He was almost certain Clarissa would be contumacious, that she would have to be coaxed or dragged into the engagement. They were always wrangling. He started when she entered, then came forward in a trepidation which was quite lover-

like. He stated his case with as much grace as possible under the circumstances.

"So you really wish to marry me?" she asked, while her hand lay listlessly in his, and her eyes searched his face curiously. She had often wondered how Theodore would act if it ever became a necessity for him to propose marriage to her. He could not tell her he adored her and could not live without her. He could not repeat any of the beautiful, thrilling untruths with which men woo their sweethearts. That would be too ridiculous, considering that they had always lived under the same roof and been thoroughly antagonistic since their childhood. "And you are marrying me because you love me, and cannot bear to live without me, are you not, Theodore?"

"Of course, dear."

"And you would sacrifice your life or fortune rather than lose me? Come, say it, Cousin Theodore!"

He had thought it would be like this. Any man who expected to marry or bury Clarissa with any degree of comfort would be disappointed.

"Why do you not answer me?"

"A man doesn't ask a woman to marry him without reasons for doing so," he answered sulkily. He wished to have the scene over. He had meant to be decent and conventional about it; that is, as much so as one could be with Clarissa.

"Yes, indeed," murmured Clarissa; "and this

love which makes the world go round is such a mystery. Of course, among the lower classes love is not the sentiment which leads people to marry. It is a less holy passion; and many times worldly matters influence them. Many a poor girl marries for the sake of a home and to be supported. But among the wealthy such restrictions need not be, and heart calls to heart across a world. There is no excuse for uncongenial marriages among the rich."

He was becoming impatient. "What is the use of this foolishness? I have asked you to marry me, and I want a straightforward answer, yes or no!"

"Oh, my dear cousin, then it is a business transaction, pure and simple, is it? Why didn't you say so at once, and not lead me into a maze of maidenly conjectures by taking my hand as you did a few moments ago and saying, Clarissa, I love you; will you be my wife? Approach me honestly, cousin, and you can do anything with me. Don't let us try to reason from false premises. Let us look matters squarely in the face. There is no love in the case. There is no question of future happiness. Our marriage is a necessity in order to keep the Barlow fortune intact."

He was angrily silent.

"On account of this money two people who dislike each other, must live together, perhaps become the parents of children."

He attempted to speak, but she would not let him.

"I don't say this isn't right, mind you; it must be, so many of our best people do it; but don't you think there are other ways, no less criminal, to compass the desired end, if society could only be brought to consider them with the same degree of leniency? For instance, if Betty Barlow should die now, the money would come naturally into Grandma Enderby's hands; then to Aunt Inez, and then to you, thereby relieving you of the fearful necessity of marrying me. Now, why not kill Grandma Barlow? How it would simplify matters! and the crime would, in reality, be very much less; that is, provided it were as heartily sanctioned by society—just the destruction of a poor old leathery body, allowing the youth-renewed soul to go free."

Theodore's patience, never at its best with Clarissa, had reached the limit.

"I could wish, Clarissa, that you were a more natural girl, that you loved feminine pursuits and suitable occupations rather than indulging in speculations with which young women have no right to addle their brains."

"I know it, Theodore. I often feel these reasoning powers of mine a great hindrance to happiness in the sphere in which Providence has been pleased to place me."

"You are in one of your disagreeable moods at present, and I shall not discuss the matter any longer today; but I advise you, Clarissa, to

think it over and decide to give a sensible answer. The arrangement I propose will be as advantageous for you as for me. You must surely see that."

"O, I do, certainly, Theodore, and I accept your proposal with one condition."

Theodore showed his astonishment. "You accept, Clarissa, and will be my wife?"

"Yes, on condition that our engagement is kept secret for six months."

Theodore was only too happy. He made a movement to take her hand.

"A betrothal kiss?" asked Clarissa. "Not at present. Wait until our engagement is announced."

In the afternoon Clarissa went to drive with Lord Kildare. This drive was very interesting because both the gentleman and lady had gone with a purpose. Kildare was in America to capture an American fortune with, of course, an American wife as an unavoidable adjunct. He had been hovering about the Jeffries' for some time. He knew there was a tangle of grandmothers between the girl and the fortune, but just how much of a tangle he had as yet been unable to discover. In case of the wrong combination of circumstances he had not, until very lately, been able to find out where the girl would stand in relation to the fortune. During his investigations he had become enamored of the girl, and craved not only her money but herself. The same day he took her to drive he had suc-

ceeded in possessing himself of the facts about the grandmothers; that in case the great-grandmother outlived the grandmother the girl came in for one-half the fortune; that the grandmother was in extremely poor health; that on account of this fact Theodore was anxious to keep the money together by marrying his cousin. This decided him to put his fate to the test at once in a good American way by taking the girl out and proposing to her before indulging in the polite preliminaries of asking her grandmothers' and aunt's consent to address her. His lordship was going to ask Clarissa Barlow to marry him, and that was his purpose in taking her to drive, and Clarissa Barlow (ambitious American to the backbone) was going to accept him, and that was her reason for going to drive with him; and she did so, receiving his protestations of fervent love with great complacency.

"By George! one would have thought her a duchess in her own right, and I her serving-man!" murmured his lordship, as he drove away after setting the young woman down at her own door.

"I have always wanted to be engaged to one of the English aristocracy, and now that desire is realized," said Clarissa to herself, as she entered the drawingroom, still in her wraps. "Of course I have sworn him to secrecy for a few weeks, during which I mean to bring him to a realizing sense of the responsibilities involved in being engaged to an American heiress. I long

to get a better insight into this international question of wealthy feminine America throwing itself into the arms of profligate, impecunious Europe. My wish has been granted. It will be a fine study. Ugh! What an odious mustache—like a shoe-brush; and what a neck! So skinny and old! Why, the man must be fifty if a day.

“Dear me, how you startled me! You, Mr. Hawkins? To see Aunt Inez, I presume; and she, I know, is out. This is her lesson day, you should remember. However, don’t go. I will run and put my wraps away and make you some tea.”

She was gone like a flash, leaving Hawkins in a pleasurable maze. He was not used to such cordiality from this young person; in fact, there had been times when her indifference approached rudeness, and her drawling, silky sarcasm downright insult. But here she was, bright, luscious, youthful, making eyes at him and tea for him. And the young lady, utterly soulless and conscienceless, busying herself with the tea-caddy and cups, was saying to herself, “I wonder if I can? It would be something to brag of to my grandchildren. Now that I have my hand in it might not be difficult.” She meant to incite Aunt Inez’s lover to propose marriage to her. She wanted to make a triple triumph of her day. Hawkins, man of the world though he was, was not proof against the blandishments of this dark little girl. His common-sense should have warned him, but it slept while his cupidity and

sensualism exposed him ,an easy victim to Miss Barlow's experiments. When, an hour later, he wavered out into the sunshine, dazzled, upset, infatuated, he was engaged to be married to the niece instead of the aunt.

"It is time for me to settle down," he reflected. "I have seen all there is to see in this world, and although a wife is a nuisance, still Clarissa is a tidy bit of furniture, with the very dot, for which I have been courting the old woman. By Jove, Chauncey Hawkins, you are a lucky dog!"

Britomart arrived at the Jeffries' mansion at the appointed time, and found Clarissa seated on a low stool in the drawing room, her hands clasped about her knees, gazing at an uncleared tea-table whereon the dishes spoke of the recent refreshment of two people.

"Excuse the untidiness, Britomart, but I wanted to sit and think unmolested by servants for awhile. When a girl has just become engaged she must have at least a few moments in which to dream, utterly alone. Oh, no, I want you. I've finished my reflections now, and the next requisite is a girl friend to act as confidant and hear your happiness. Yes, I should rush into your arms, cry a little, and confide the delicious secret to your keeping. I can't cry, but I could indulge in a good hearty laugh. Who is the man? Chauncey Hawkins. You remember that dear old fellow of sixty, who dresses like a student of twenty. He is a man of fashion who has led a vile life. Of late years

his business ventures have not been prosperous, yet he sees nothing incongruous in marrying a young girl who has been respectable, with some claim to good looks, and the prospects of a fortune in her own right. Neither would my people see any reason against my marrying him if he were worth a million or so. Even without that, the fact that he is admitted into good society and knows the ways of the world makes him desirable. Aunt Inez wants him herself."

"Clarissa!" gasped Britomart, who seldom called her pupil by her first name, "you have not engaged yourself to such a man?"

"Oh, but I have, and worse still, to two others—all today. I never do things by the halves. Yes, my cousin Theodore and dear Lord Kil-dare. Ugh! How I dislike that man's mustache!"

Britomart was not going to humor the young lady by scolding her or appearing astonished. She had an idea that was what Clarissa was playing for.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, sitting down and removing her hat, but still holding it in her lap.

"Goodness knows," smiled Clarissa, "unless some clause can be inserted in Chicago marriage laws allowing me to keep my promise to them all. Was ever a girl so honored? They all want me on account of the money."

Britomart made no reply, and Clarissa fell into smiling silence. The little clock on the mantel

ticked audibly and the fire snapped in the grate. Clarissa's gurgling laugh broke the silence.

"I've just thought how it can be arranged. Lord Kildare marry Betty Barlow (there wouldn't be much disparity in their ages), Chauncey Hawkins marry Aunt Inez, and I'll marry Cousin Theodore. This would divide the spoils—we would all get a slice of the fortune and everybody would be happy, except, of course, Theodore."

CHAPTER XIII.

Britomart's duties were manifold during this period of her career. For instance, one morning she awoke to the consciousness that she must prepare three meals, give four music lessons, and, under Blair's direction, address a labor meeting in the evening. It was not her first appearance in this role by any means. Blair had been quick to see the possibilities of success in this splendid young woman. He noted the respectful admiration which was accorded the girl by the laboring men to whom she spoke. Dissolute as some of them were, unused to contact with any save the lowest of womankind, they still recognized and applauded the spirit of earnest womanliness in which she addressed them. They came to the meetings first because a woman, who was young and pretty, was going to do something unusual. They came afterward to listen to the gospel of Socialism. It was the sober, conservative class of men who suffered, yet refused to listen to disrespectful allusions to the wage system because that inferred disrespect to their employers; who dumbly followed where they were led and believed a vote honestly cast with their own party, irrespective of principles, would help right their wrongs; who believed this stress was but temporary and would pass again as days of stress had passed in years

gone by; men who were too much exhausted at night to read more than a meager page of abusive editorials in their party paper, full of satisfying epithets against the opposing political faction, and who consequently missed the new ideas which were filling the world. It was to this class in the cities Blair intended Britomart to appeal; and in the country to staid old farmers, who were only just beginning to ask indignant questions of society. To these men especially, Britomart, herself a farmer's daughter, and as surely a victim as any toiler in a sweat-shop, stood before them in her youth and beauty and said: "We, the working people of America, have reached the limit of endurance. We, in our intelligence, in our independence, refuse to suffer in ignorance of the cause of our suffering as the peoples of the old world have done before. We declare war against our tyrants. We already know the reason for our poverty. We know that this beautiful land of forests, wheatfields, and mines of precious metals, which should be ours—the nation's—is owned by less than a score of men. We no longer deny this as we did twenty years ago, because it has become so plain that he who runs may read. We have not that spirit of resignation bred and nurtured in the old countries and voiced in the Episcopal catechism; namely, 'To be content in that station of life to which God has pleased to call us.' God did not arrange this system. In the old days we fled from too much

government, and for a time our religion of the less government the better, was sufficient; but, alas! we have outgrown it. Do not accuse me of lack of patriotism when I say our republic is becoming a failure. I say it in sorrow and shame, yet I say it. And you, if you will, can prove it for yourselves. We are no longer a republic, but an oligarchy. We are not alone in our misery. Every government in the old world is as wax in the hands of its bondholders. But we, young, proud, holding the remedy in our own hands—shall we prove our servility by enduring it? Never think it! Never believe it! America is today in the rear in this matter, but the giant is awakening, and before another decade has passed will stride to the front with the feet of light, the first to break the golden chains and enfranchise the peoples of the world, for where we lead the world shall follow. But first we must know! We must know! This is why I stand before you. This I implore you to do. Study the problem. Do not thrust it from you and say, 'Let reformers rant; they have always agitated, and it has come to nothing.' It is your problem; which way do you intend to solve it? By your intelligent ballots, gaining a bloodless victory, not suddenly but surely; or will you let the sore fester until it bursts in blood and flame as did that plague-spot of France a hundred years ago!

"I need not stand here to tell you that you suffer injustice; you know that, but you differ

as to the remedy. We, I and my fellow-workers, believe there is but one remedy—Socialism. The word startles you, and you feebly cling to the more familiar 'Democracy,' which has become unreal and false. You stretch out your hand to grasp that of Democracy, but the fiend Plutocracy interposes its own and, as yet, you have not discovered the substitution. When you do, how quick and complete will be the revolution. Do you not realize that this idea is the paramount one of the day? Already we have Socialism in our public schools, postal service, state hospitals, asylums, colleges, labor bureaus, fire departments, water supplies, electric plants, and hundreds of other institutions; and wherever Socialism lays its healing hand there you find justice and order. Whenever a monopoly becomes a natural monopoly, let the nation grasp it for the nation's good. Let the mines, railroads, telegraphs, and later, land—the earth—belong to the people.

"The fortune of a Jay Gould or a Rockefeller is like a tumor on the body of a state. Men say, 'How great it is! How we are developing!' But they forget the emaciation of other parts, the deadly illness, the strength of the body social being sapped to maintain the unnatural excrescence. To this disease the glittering knife of Socialism will be applied and the tonic of justice so tone up the body politic that it will be impossible for other such strength-sapping monstrosities to form. But there is danger, there is

danger, that this disease may be allowed to run too long. One of our statesmen said in a letter to a western newspaper, 'In a joint stock association all stockholders and all classes of stockholders should have their full rights; but whenever those who have the bulk put the power into the hands of those who own but little, there is much unwisdom in it.' This means that a man without property should not be allowed to vote at all. Dangerously un-American, but were you or I a multi-millionaire, I doubt if our innate Americanism would be strong enough to overcome the selfish wish to control absolutely what we deemed our own, despite a few million paupers who believed they had a right to live, just because they had been born, and to live in a land which belonged to us. We do not hate Rockefeller, but we do hate the pernicious system which makes his far-reaching though natural selfishness possible. The sooner we divest ourselves of the silly idea that multi-millionaires are a benefit to a country, the better it will be for us."

Clarissa Barlow had hit upon this very afternoon to pay Britomart a long-threatened visit. Upon learning that James Barrington would address an audience on the labor question that evening, and that Britomart and Paul were going to hear him, she insisted on being one of the party. She did not know that Britomart was to speak also, and when she listened to those ringing words on the lips of her friend, she

caught her breath in an ecstasy of admiration. She felt the stir and rustle of appreciation all about her, the increasing murmurs of whispers and smothered ejaculations. The many eyes always bent on the speaker served to show with what power she held her audience.

James Barrington followed her, and although more logical, more concise in statement, being of more importance as a man and a millionaire, his words did not burn into the hearts of the people as did those of the woman. It was Clarissa's first experience at a mass meeting, and although she saw before her the familiar faces of Britomart and Barrington, it seemed as though she had been transported into another world, peopled with beings as different from those in her world as must be the inhabitants of Mars from ours; yet she, the heiress of a million or more, felt a fierce desire to declare her kinship to these, her brothers. She, by virtue of the blood of Melton, the factory hand, was nearer by a generation to these proletariats than was Cousin Theodore.

After the meeting Britomart and Paul walked home with her. At the door they left her to face alone the storm which awaited her in the drawing-room. Theodore was there, white to the lips with anger; Mrs. Jeffries, and even Grandma Enderby. Clarissa bade her friends good-night and walked smilingly into the presence, her heavy fur-bordered cloak trailing from her grasp and sweeping the floor like a royal mantle. She

never ceased to smile when Theodore opened upon her with all the scathing invectives his tongue could master. That she, a Barlow, should hobnob with beggars and mountebanks! She reminded him that she was a Melton. He took no heed of the interruption. He wished her to understand that this intimacy must cease at once. He, as her natural guardian, commanded her to drop all intercourse with the pernicious inciter of riots who had crept into their home under the guise of instructor to work her own evil ends.

"Our erstwhile happy home," murmured Clarissa.

Theodore's rage was allowed free swing, interrupted only now and then by a word from one or the other of the three women who formed his audience. In the course of his accusation he acknowledged that he had followed Clarissa first to the "den" of the Landors, and from there to the ill-smelling hall where he managed to endure to the end of the most sickening performance for the sake of watching over the woman who had demeaned herself by attending, but who, nevertheless, was destined to be his, Theodore Jeffries', wife!

"Terrible!" sighed Mrs. Jeffries. She was sleepy and tired and longed for the scene to end.

"You were there? And you heard it all? Oh, Cousin Theodore, I am so glad!" and Clarissa clasped her hands in delight; then subsiding into a chair, she leaned her arms upon

its back, the rich cloak trailing on the floor beside her. "But I am never to be your wife, Theodore—never. I have this day," she continued, dreamily, "seen the man I shall marry, if Fate so wills that he may be mine; if not, I will remain a maid, to tantalize you and Aunt Inez forever."

Aunt Inez smothered an exclamation of dismay. Grandma Enderby groaned.

"Am I to understand that this is your ultimate decision?" asked Theodore, his lips compressed in anger, yet with a feeling of relief in his heart.

"It is."

"Then the gossip about Kildare is true?"

"Kildare?" asked Clarissa, absently.

"I was told that he boasted of his engagement to you."

Clarissa made a ticking sound with her lips indicative of disapproval.

"Foolish man! I swore him to secrecy. But it doesn't matter. Ask me no more questions; at present I can only repeat, I have, this day, looked into the eyes of the man who shall be my husband, else no man ever shall be. Let that suffice. And now I want to see Betty Barlow and then go to bed."

Clarissa left the room, and Theodore continued to pace up and down in stormy silence. His mother yawned behind her hand, and gently suggested the desirability, now that the interview was at an end, of retiring.

"This is the work of Barrington and his kind!"

said Theodore. "I can conceive a reason for those poverty-ridden louts spouting their unrightable wrongs, but when such men as Barring stoop to proclaim their insanity in such places, I can but wonder what the world is coming to."

"Barring knows what he is about," sneered Mrs. Jeffries. "He is likely to get to Congress through his efforts to succor the laboring man, and that is all he cares for."

"But why need he make himself so conspicuous? There he was tonight, spouting of syndicates and trusts, and wrongs which would soon be righted, and a universal brotherhood of man. Bosh! It was sickening!"

"Did James Barring speak tonight? That is a key to the mystery, then. James Barring, mark my words, Theodore, is the man Clarissa is in love with and means to catch if she can."

Theodore stopped short. "Do you believe that?"

"I do. She certainly meant what she said tonight, that she had looked into the eyes of the man whom she would marry if she could. She has not to my knowledge seen Kildare today and she has dismissed you. Whom else could it be?"

Theodore laughed. "If this should happen, Barring the Socialist would be closely concerned with the great Barlow manufacturing plant. I wonder what he would say then to his agitators and laborers? It would not be a bad arrange-

ment. He has a splendid fortune of his own, and Heaven knows, we would all be glad to get rid of Clarissa in any respectable manner. My marriage with her, it seems, is out of the question."

Britomart, woman-like, went home with her heart full, not, as might be supposed, with fervor for the cause for which she had spoken, but of the image of one face, one smooth, manly face, lit by narrow gleaming eyes. Was this friendship? He was Clarissa's lover. Was this patriotism? She was letting admiration for the man overshadow her feeling for the reformer. Ah, the dreariness of everything, the bitterness of this grinding poverty; the constant fear for Paul; the vagueness of the cause for which she was pledged to spend her life. It seemed very hopeless that night.

The following day she received a letter from her mother full of longing to see her girl. She was not well, and the sight of Britomart's face would be like medicine to her. Britomart decided at once that she could not go. Her lesson engagements, her Socialistic work, and more than all her constant, watchful care over Paul, forbade her absence from the city. Then she met Blair, and, as was her habit, laid the trouble before him.

"Go," he said. "You owe a duty to others beside your brother. I will take care of him. I think I shall have a chance to set him at work soon, and when Paul is at work no one is better

able to take care of himself; but Paul idle is a dangerous fellow—growing more so every day. And ah! Miss Landor, the poor boys who crowd this city who are counterparts of Paul, with no friend nor sister able to help them, and the number is increasing every day.” Then he proceeded to tell her news—good news. The Socialists were to have an organ of their own there in Chicago. James Barrington was to be its financial sponsor, and he, Blair, its editor-in-chief. It would rest on the basis of James Barrington’s millions, and would carry the political news, unbiased by party politics, into the homes of thousands of laboring men. Blair believed everything for its future. He believed he could, in time, make it self-supporting, but whether that ever came to pass or not, it was to be tried at Barrington’s expense.

“And as I deal with the minds of the people through that sheet, may God so deal with me,” added Blair, solemnly. “Barrington is a grand man. He is going to Congress next spring just as sure as the world stands, and that means a strong voice in a high place for our cause.”

Britomart made the preparations for her journey in a happier mood in consequence of her conversation with Blair. In some way the proximity of the man put hope in one, and a desire to work. She did not know of the decree of banishment against her which the master of the Jeffries mansion had issued, but she wrote a little note to Clarissa asking to be excused from her

lessons for a month, and announcing that she must cancel her musicale dates, as she was going to visit her sick mother the next day.

That night Blair came to tea with the Landors, and just as they were about to take their places at the table, Clarissa arrived, escorted by James Barrington. Britomart was embarrassed and showed it, but forgot it presently in laughing at Clarissa, who declared that although she had been to tea, she was simply starving for those cunning little biscuits, and couldn't Britomart lay a couple more plates and make room for Mr. Barrington and herself?

Britomart long remembered that evening. The men talked earnestly and without reserve of the coming newspaper, which was to be a first-class daily, devoted to the betterment of existing conditions.

"The success of the cause for which you and I pray is assured, Miss Landor," said Barrington. "'On the shoulders of existing political parties we shall ride to victory. First one side makes us a concession, then the other, not to be outdone in currying favor with the labor vote, betters it, and thus right shall win even as it is winning in England.'"

Clarissa whispered an account of the family's rage on her return from the people's meeting, and told Britomart, without reserve, of Theodore's denouncement.

"That ends my giving you lessons, then," said Britomart with a sigh, "for I certainly shall enter

the doors of no man who has requested me to keep without."

"They are no more his doors than mine, for that matter," said Clarissa. "I shall continue my lessons with you, but I promise to come here; I also promise that before six months are gone you shall receive an invitation from Theodore himself to darken our doors once more."

It was a jolly evening. The arch plotters passed the close of it in light talk and laughter, making merry, as a company of young optimists necessarily would. After the "little biscuits" were disposed of the men smoked around the cook stove, "just like a lot of peasants," Clarissa said, while she helped Britomart wash the supper dishes. So it happened that, owing to this evening visit, Britomart started for home in a buoyant mood the next morning, but it faded away before she reached her destination.

Frank met her at the station and she was struck by his look of age and hopelessness.

"How thin you are!" she said, pinching his cheek. "Aren't you well? And how is Bumpy and Bumpy's ma; and how is business—tell me everything."

"There is not much to tell, Britomart. The outlook is very discouraging. We are an unlucky family at best. Did you know father had put another mortgage on the place?"

"Yes, and that more than anything else is undermining mother's health. To think that the

home she loves and for which she has worked so hard is likely to be lost to them!"

"And what will they do, Britomart, when it is lost? They haven't a chick nor a child who could give them a shelter in their old age. I, at least, could not, but perhaps you could, or Paul—there in the city——"

Britomart's eyes blazed. "Paul, poor boy, has had no work at his trade for months. The day has gone by when the average mechanic can hope for any surety of a living. The manufacturer is not in the habit of giving men steady employment. He hires them until his immediate orders are filled, then discharges an army of them, knowing well enough that another army, fully as competent, will be waiting longingly to fill their places whenever he needs them. In this way, of course, the curse of dull times falls on the laborer instead of the manufacturer."

Frank sighed, and in that sigh Britomart read all the tragedy of broken hopes. They walked on in silence for awhile, then he slackened his pace and said, "Wait a minute, Britomart, I want to consult you on business matters before we reach home. I don't like to speak of it before poor Mary—she is so brave——" His voice trembled. "Next week I shall make an assignment. There is no use of prolonging this misery further. God knows I have tried hard for Mary and the boy's sake, but it is no go. It will not be ten years before small shopkeepers will be a thing of the past. They suck the blood out

of us—those big department vampires of the city—they and bad debts together. The farmers have all they can do to keep up the interest on their mortgages without paying their grocery bills.”

“What shall you do?”

“That is what I would ask you. There isn’t room for us back on the farm. Father and William John are steadily falling behind. I thought I might go west and start in the grocery business there; but, Britomart, as far as I can hear, it is just the same in the west.”

Britomart assented gloomily. “Mammon is king of the West and the East, of the North and the South, of the sea and the plains. Verily these are the days when to him who hath shall be given, and from him who hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

CHAPTER XIV.

Mary greeted Britomart enthusiastically and presented Bumpy, now a serious young man of two, with ideas of his own, and a quantity of tow-colored hair so fine it was in the habit of knotting up in hard little balls at the back, owing to the friction of the uneasy little head with the pillow. At first he was awed by his handsome auntie, but before long was asking her more questions in a minute than she could answer in a month, even if she had understood them.

"Frank, this child speaks like a Turk whom I saw in Chicago this spring."

"But he thinks like an American," laughed Frank. "He has very decided political views. He says his Grandpa Spence is a 'democrack,' but he wants Santa Claus for president."

Britomart noticed how thin and anxious Mary looked. That happy spontaneity, her chief charm, was held in check or dying out, and if she smiled, she sighed afterwards. In talking with Britomart, she said, "I would not care to be rich. I only ask that by hard work and pinching economy we might see that we were accumulating something for Bumpy's education and our own old age; but in place of that, after two years' work, we are worse off than when you went away; and, Britomart, there is nothing else. Farming no longer pays. Land is so high no poor man can purchase and hope to pay for

his farm by his own labor, and one cannot make a living on a rented farm. Father's mortgage has grown steadily and he must, in time, lose his place. Oh! Britomart, this is a wretched world, and you were right when you said Bumpy had no business in it!"

"And yet," declared Britomart, "this country is a land of milk and honey. There would be enough for us all if a small number were not knaves and the rest all fools. But the good time is coming—coming, Mary, when a man who labors will not be obliged to reproach himself for bringing a child into the world, when his child, defrauded from his birth by the short-sightedness of bygone law-makers and the greed of present usurpers, shall come to his own. We shall, at least, see the dawning, Mary, but Bumpy's generation shall see the glorious day."

A feeling of responsibility in the future of this child swept over Britomart, and she caught him up and hugged him impulsively.

"Ouch!" cried Bumpy, "my b'ak-an'-boo 'pot!" and Mary explained that he was never without them—his black and blue spots—and must always be handled with care on account of them.

After tea William John came to take Britomart home, and his dear face was so full of brotherly welcome that Britomart came very near crying on his shoulder.

"How is Paul?" he asked apprehensively, and

Britomart answered, "Oh, Paul is all right, thanks to Dennis Blair."

"And Britomart, I bet," added William John.

"I have done what I could," assented the girl. "But, William John, Chicago is full of Pauls; good fellows naturally, but moneyless, discouraged, reckless—desperate. Oh, my heart yearns over them. May God in his goodness hasten the triumph of Socialism, and the day when no man tramps the streets of a pitiless city looking in vain for work."

She dashed the tears of unavailing pity from her eyes. "Don't think I am always like this; I seldom weep, but work. There are other women who must weep who cannot work; but I have any amount of strength, a voice, a will, a temper fully aroused, and thoughts, thoughts—ever and always of the people's wrongs. I no longer hesitate for the best words in which to express myself. I no longer tremble when the chairman of the meeting rises and clears his throat preparatory to introducing me. I can hardly wait until he has finished, for there before me, row behind row, crowded to the doors, I see the faces of men, some anxious to hear the gospel of Socialism and better times; others unconcerned, dull, stolid and indifferent; men whom I must cheer, convince or awaken. They will listen to me because I am a woman, and they, the workers, are chivalrous. It is the American laboring man who has been the first to acknowledge that woman has rights beyond

those of a slave; he not only admires but respects her. Then I begin, and the truth pours out of my mouth like a torrent. What need to choose my words? It is the truth, the truth! And here I see a ripple of assent and there I hear a rumble of disapproval; then a wave of applause breaks at my feet—not for me, but for that which I am saying; by this time they have forgotten me; then a ripple of laughter; and that is good, for when men laugh they are in good trim to catch the infection of new ideas, and presently it is over, and I stagger back out of sight, exhausted, worn, but happy on account of the roar in front, and the look of satisfied pleasure on Blair's face as he comes and wraps me up and hands me over to Paul."

"This is not all new to us," Frank said. "Bid Leeklaw brings papers now and then with your name in, and he is as proud of you as though you were his daughter. We have the same visitors of a Saturday night that we used to have when you were at home, only many more; as the customers decrease the loafers increase. You knew, of course, that your old sweetheart, Henry Miller, is married. Yes, and as great a republican as ever. I think, by the tone of his paper that he has entirely lost sight of the issues of his party and knows of nothing but the name republicanism. He deals out epithets promiscuously, and has arrived at that point where the slightest allusion to politics will cause him to puff up and swear and sweat with

wrath. Bid Leeklaw knows this, and, backed by Jake Flatterbush and a dozen or so more demopopulo-Socialists, makes life a burden to him. He is not so prosperous as of yore. The hard times are having the same effect on the newspaper business that they are on the rest of us, and Henry's 'coat the winter wind will find quite thin'."

"There are Socialists in Belleville now?" asked Britomart.

Frank grinned. "My dear, the woods are full of 'em, and augmenting every day; even Mary's father is a convert, and although a 'democrack,' as Bumpy has it, still, if you were to deliver a Socialistic harangue in the hall, Mr. Spence, on the front seat, would clap his hands to a blister."

"And old Leven?" asked Britomart.

William John laughed, and Frank declared that such men as old Leven must be left to the gentle hand of Time to remove in order that their places in the world might be filled by reasoning human beings.

"And Tilly?"

"Oh, married, and of late a happy mother."

Britomart glanced sidewise at William John, imagining she discerned a twitch of pain about his patient mouth.

"And the magazine girl?" she inquired, laughing.

"I've married her," answered William John, "and although she isn't much at housework, she is a great adviser."

"Good!" cried Britomart. "You will find some one to take her place, old fellow, who'll be worth eight or ten Tilly Levens. And Brother Granby, I presume——"

There was a confusion caused by everybody talking at once. "Brother Granby took your words to heart deeply. He is no fool," said Frank.

"Yes," interrupted Mary, "and he is a Socialist."

William John was roaring with laughter. "That's straight, Britomart; he preaches it in the pulpit. It's like this. He says he had never thought much on the subject until he came in contact with Dennis Blair and discussed the questions of strikes, unequal division of wealth, and so on. Your saying that Christ preached Socialism shocked then fascinated him. He began studying Socialistic books. He came to a realizing sense that he had been talking in the pulpit about a subject of which he knew not the first principles. He had even many times connected the two words Socialism and anarchy. In fact, the sensitive old man became convinced that through his ignorance he had committed sin and he has gone zealously to work to atone for it."

Britomart was shocked at the change in her mother. She was so worn and thin, and her hair, which had been brown and smooth when Britomart went away, was now strongly tinged with gray. Britomart went about the old home

setting things to rights in that strong, efficient way of hers, which is such a comfort to one who, like Mrs. Landor, loves order but feels too languid to spend the effort to bring it about.

The spring crept on apace. The oaks turned brown, then green. The turbid yellow stream, which had worn deep ravines at the roadsides, shriveled away in the sunshine, and still Britomart lingered. She received scant word from the city. Paul was not a generous correspondent. One day she visited the little cottage on the hill which had been the home of Dennis Blair the summer he wrote his book. It was again empty and forlorn. She pressed her face against the western pane in the old way and tried to recall with enthusiasm that dream of furnishing in which she used to indulge, but so much intruded between that she gave it up. She walked over the ploughed land to the marsh, thinking of Paul, of dear old William John and her father, and scheming how she might bring a little more of the sunshine of life into their existence.

When she was returning she met Henry Miller. She gave him a bow and a smile, but he drove on furiously, with only a curt nod in return, and Britomart never knew that he had been to the expense of hiring a livery horse and taking this trip in the hopes of meeting her and being enabled to show her how very little he regretted their separation.

One day in early June she left the street car in Chicago with her modest little traveling bag in

hand and hurried through the narrow alley to her own door. Upon unlocking the door and entering, a feeling of apprehension stole over her. The place smelt close, as though it had not been opened for a long time. Where was Paul? As she stepped over the threshold something on the floor attracted her attention. She stooped and picked up her own letter, written over a week ago, which the postman had slid under the door. It was the letter announcing her intention to return home on that day. This, then, accounted for Paul's absence. She had been wondering all the way in the car if she should pick up her city life again just where she had left it, or if, as is so often the case during an absence, some unforeseen circumstance would give it an altogether different trend. She had hoped to see Paul at the station, and again imagined him at home building a fire in the little stove and putting on the kettle for tea; but here was the home evidently deserted for days—no welcome, no warmth, save that left by the sun which had already set.

She moved restlessly about the inhospitable rooms, noting the cooking utensils, unwashed and unused for weeks. She opened all the windows to let in such air as straggled through the alley; then, moved by an overmastering anxiety for her brother, put on her hat and gloves, closed and locked the place, and started for Blair's rooms to inquire for Paul. The nearer she came to her destination the deeper grew her

feeling of apprehension. It was getting dark and Britomart was in haste. She turned a corner sharply and came in contact with a little body going hastily in the opposite direction. The next instant her hands were fast in those of Clarissa Barlow's, and that young lady was very seriously admonishing her to the effect that a tall, solidly built young woman like herself was in danger of causing the death of fragile little things by hurling themselves around corners in that reckless manner.

Britomart was not really glad to see Clarissa. She was too anxious and too impatient to reach Blair's rooms before he should be going out for the evening. When Clarissa learned her destination she insisted upon accompanying her. "It isn't proper for a pretty woman like you to be seen climbing to Mr. Blair's rookery alone at this time in the evening."

"Oh!" snapped Britomart, "we Socialistic agitators and breeders of sedition are not obliged to preserve any decorum in our comings and goings. The world doesn't expect it; but you, Clarissa—I wish you would go about your affairs and leave me alone tonight; I am not good company. I am too anxious about my brother. They won't mind me up there, but if you come it will frighten them to death."

Clarissa, for answer, laughed in her soft, little aggravating way, linked her arm in Britomart's and proceeded, as usual, to follow her own inclinations.

It was a long climb to Blair's attic but the girls were assured of the gentlemen's being at home by a roar of manly laughter proceeding from the room.

"Goodness!" said Clarissa, "they are having a mass-meeting in there evidently. Shall we venture?"

"I certainly shall," said Britomart. "I didn't come up here to make a fashionable call, and I warned you to stay away."

The door flew open in response to Britomart's determined rap, emitting a strong odor of coffee. In the center of the supper table, which was arranged for three, stood a spirit lamp over which bubbled the odorous coffee-pot.

Clarissa uttered a delighted exclamation. "Bohemia!" she cried, "and I am in it, at last! How wicked never to have asked me here before, and——"

"Britomart!" exclaimed Paul Landor, dragging his sister into the light with a look of welcome in his face. Britomart knew very well he would not have been there had he been doing anything of which she would not approve. Blair and James Barrington, the third member of the bachelor party, came forward to greet the ladies.

"Have you more plates?" asked Clarissa. "Poor Britomart has had no supper, and I am as hungry as I can be. Is this the dish cupboard? No, Paul, let me get them, please. I know a good housekeeper has been spoiled in me through lack of opportunity to practice."

"Paul, just throw in another spoonful or two of coffee, will you?" said Blair; "and I will trouble you, Barring, to put the chairs around the table."

The sudden revulsion of feeling, from anxiety and suspense to pleasure and happiness, in finding Paul so innocently engaged, made Britomart almost hysterical. She talked and laughed recklessly, and Clarissa thought, "How beautiful she is, with her rose-leaf complexion, her dark hair and flashing eyes. Such wit, such laughter!" Paul and Clarissa were unusually bright. Sometimes they fell to talking of the "Chicago Bulletin," the paper, which was already a thing of fact, edited by Blair and sustained by Barring. In the midst of their serious talk Blair took up his violin and silence fell on the company. The high window stood open to admit the night air, and a full June moon came peering over the housetops into that attic room. It seemed to Britomart as though her soul were drifting out to it on a flood of Blair's weird music. New speculations crept in and out of her brain, always in time to the air the violin was playing, and always pleasantly, because Paul was there, safe and happy, and Blair, and—James Barring. She wondered how Clarissa came to be so well acquainted with them all; she had called Paul by his first name; she wondered if James Barring's face, stern almost to sadness under the influence of the music, was a happiness and a pain to Clarissa as it was to her. Little

by little in the pauses of the music and conversation they explained much to her which she had not understood. Paul was employed in the office of "their" paper. Clarissa had been attending the meetings of the club regularly ever since Britomart's departure, and declared herself an out-and-out Socialist. At parting Clarissa said, "I am coming to see you tomorrow, Britomart, because I have so much to tell you."

There was not so much in her budget of news, but told in her way it was entertaining in the extreme. Lord Kildare, although his confidence in her interest ebbed and flowed, still considered her his affianced wife. Since her Grandmother Enderby's death, which occurred in the late spring, Cousin Theodore had been fully convinced that they must marry, although she had broken their engagement, telling him she knew their lives would be miserable spent in each other's society. Cousin Theodore was very angry at James Barring on account of his connection with the "Chicago Bulletin," and sincerely hoped he would not get the nomination for congressman in his own state, of which there was a rumor. Such men, he said, were dangerous members of the community, especially when they were the possessors of millions. Thank heaven, millionaire reformers were not plenty! It was fun, she said, to see Theodore's beetling brows when my Lord Kildare hove in sight. He had told her many shocking things about my lord, which, had it been advisable to palm her off upon his lord-

ship, she might have learned through wifely intuition for all of her fond cousin's information.

"And as for poor old Chauncey Hawkins, Theodore does not dream of that old beau's aspirations; but Aunt Inez does, and suffers pangs of jealousy in consequence. She is really in love with the old sinner, and he flirts with her when he thinks I am not looking. He knows a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and he isn't sure how far in the bush this blackbird is."

Clarissa spoke of many musical engagements waiting for Britomart, and declared herself envious of a girl with two careers looming before her.

Britomart began her life again, playing, teaching, studying and speaking for the cause of Socialism. At last the latter duty slowly but surely crowded out the others, and she gave up her pupils. In the fall the Landors moved to more comfortable quarters in a modest little flat, and Britomart hired a young girl to do the kitchen work, thus giving all of her time to the real business of her life. During this time Clarissa flitted in and out of her days like a dark velvet moth, coming and going unbidden in her quiet, impudent way. When Britomart spoke of her marriage she answered only with a smile and an enigmatical gleam from her narrow dark eyes. Once she said that a girl who was the affianced of three very determined men must be careful

about marriage for fear of hurting some one's feelings.

When in the city James Barrington always came to see the Landors. He knew this woman with the queenly head was a power in the growing world of Socialists. As soon as possible after his successful campaign he came to Chicago, and to Britomart, to receive her congratulations. He found the home closed and learned that Britomart was again with her people in Wisconsin. There was no lack of enthusiasm in the reception accorded him by Chicago Socialists, but he was not satisfied.

Britomart, standing among the dead sunflower stalks which whispered of winter about the deserted Leven cottage, dreaming of many things, suddenly found herself face to face with one of the materialized shadows of her dreams, James Barrington. Her heart stood still. What could he, the man of riches and newly acquired political honors, want here at her humble old home? He held her hands long in greeting and smiled anxiously into her eyes upturned to his. This man of the world, this mine-owner, millionaire, and successful politician was pale with apprehension lest Britomart Landor, the country girl, should not see fit to grant what he was about to ask; then, with a straightforwardness characteristic of him, he plunged into the matter at hand.

"And Clarissa?" asked Britomart, with dry lips.

"Clarissa?" he repeated, bewildered.

"She loves you, she——"

"I think you are mistaken, Britomart. There has never been a word of love between Clarissa and myself. I do not want Clarissa; I want you." His arms were about her and his lips were pressed to hers in a solemn kiss of betrothal. The winds might whisper of the night to the dead sunflowers, and the chill of autumn wither the brown fields, but here was the eternal spring-time of honest love. "We cannot count the money ours, Britomart. It belongs to the people—the cause. Nor can ours be a life of leisure."

"No, no," assented Britomart, "I can work in a certain way, and work I must—you in your way, I in mine, but together."

"It is growing dark," he said; "come, dear." He drew her towards the cottage gate, and as they reached it an open carriage went by, the driver of which Britomart recognized as Henry Miller. He glanced at them and passed on, his seedy equipage soon going out of sight below the hill.

Britomart shuddered.

"Are you cold?" asked Barrington.

"No," she said; "that man who just passed was the editor to whom I was engaged once upon a time. You see I have a penchant for newspaper men. His paper differs from yours in its politics, I believe."

"Thank Heaven! you saw fit to change your mind in that newspaperman's case; and, pray

Heaven, you may not in the case of this one!"

"But I didn't," laughed Britomart. "He changed his mind—jilted me." And Britomart told her lover the story of her unhappy farm life as they went down the hill together.

CHAPTER XV.

Britomart saw but little of her lover during the winter, but she was not lonely. Happiness and hard work banish loneliness. Prosperity had surely come to her and hers, although not produced by the political plasters applied by the demagogues who had howled themselves hoarse at the fall elections, and who promised that, should their party be successful, the land would bask under the smiling sun of plenty once more, and all economic evils be done away with. She was supporting herself handsomely now, thanks to the fad-chasers of Chicago society, who, merely for the reason that they could not always get her, always yearned for her services. She found herself in the Jeffries parlors one evening, to play Mrs. Jeffries' accompaniments and incidentally a solo in the course of the entertainment. Mrs. Jeffries had sent an urgent request, so urgent as to be almost a prayer, together with a check of goodly size. Britomart accepted, made use of the check where it would do the most good, and presented herself in good time, tastefully arrayed in pale blue silk, cut low in front to show her round, white throat. On her bosom she wore a bunch of white camelias—she loved white blossoms—pinned with the identical diamond which Clarissa had insisted upon her wearing on the occasion of her first appear-

ance. It was her own now, a gift from Clarissa, who would not take a refusal when she pressed the gift upon her friend. Mrs. Jeffries was in white, with a great sheaf of red poppies falling over her shoulder. She was nervous and ill at ease, her eyes wandering occasionally to the corner where Chauncey Hawkins answered Lord Kildare's questions in an absent-minded manner. Both these gentlemen had come early in hopes of catching a word alone with Clarissa, the heiress, and both had been disappointed, for Clarissa had not as yet appeared.

Between a restless, domineering son, a vacillating lover, and a wayward niece, Mrs. Inez' lot was not a happy one. Her eyes snapped quite as brilliantly, but the lines across the brow beneath the pompadour of black hair were growing very prominent.

Hilda French arrived presently, floating into the room, a veritable vision of light, in a fluffy, white dress and brilliants.

Suddenly a servant twitched the portieres across the great doors, shutting off the hall. Mrs. Jeffries did not understand this action, but, as it was apparently for some very good purpose, concluded not to investigate.

Britomart finished arranging her music, then turned vaguely to the small company, wondering what kept Clarissa.

"Where is everybody?" muttered Theodore, snapping his watch. "It is late."

Just then the curtain was held back by a fine, white hand which Britomart recognized with

alarm, admitting Clarissa, closely followed by two men. If Britomart had been startled by the apparition of Blair's well known hand on the curtain, she was much more so to see her brother Paul and the owner of the hand following Clarissa into that house.

Clarissa advanced to the center of the room, her black hair coiling itself low on her neck and close to her creamy cheeks. She wore a great black hat, tilted very much to one side, and a dress of white satin, the waist heavy with rich lace and costly pearls. Her opera cloak dragged far upon the floor like the ermine-trimmed train of a queen. This cloak-dragging was a trick of Clarissa's which the family had learned to dread, knowing it meant trouble. Blair, quiet, imperturbable, his Indian-like profile showing no sign of uneasiness, followed close behind, bowing over a hat which one slender hand held crushed against his breast. Paul, handsome, and triumphant, smiled grimly at his old employer from the vantage ground of good clothes and independence.

"Good evening, Hilda and Britomart. Come here and stand beside me," commanded Clarissa. "This is the last act of the play. Clear the stage and get the actors ready for a quick drop. And you, Mademoiselle Britomart, are not the central figure, let me remind you of that. It is your humble servant, who loves to be theatrical as she loves to live. Aunt Inez, there can be no musicale here tonight, as there is death in the house. I ordered John to close the portiere and quietly

send the guests away; but I wished to notify you in here myself. Betty Barlow has finished her long career tonight, and lies upstairs now, straight and still, her crooked old hands resting at last from their useless activity. Cousin Theodore, this is my husband, Dennis Blair, to whom I was married one hour ago, with our mutual friend, Mr. Paul Landor, as one of the witnesses. You remember, cousin, of likening the Socialistic movement to the eternal advance of waves upon an unyielding shore only to meet an easy defeat and fall back in helplessness, and, you remember, I suggested that although the waves might not create any perceptible change in the shore line, that every wave did, after all, leave its mark on the adamantine barriers, and that, however that might be, the waves in their mad struggle now and then submerged individuals. Cousin Theodore, your head is under the waves. You must learn to look to Socialists for future business successes, for the money, the mills, the bonds, the houses, are not half yours and half mine, but by the will of Betty Barlow, all mine to belong to me and my heirs forever!"

Theodore uttered a cry and sprang forward as though he would strike the girl, but Blair interposed his person between them, and the eyes of the two men met on a level and at close range, Blair's cool, merciless, Jeffries' despairing, hating and seething for revenge. Kildare came forward bridling, and was confronted by six feet of manly contempt in the person of Paul Landor, who was perfectly willing there should be a scene.

"You damned mountebank, how dare you inveigle that foolish girl into a marriage with you!"

"Indeed, Theodore, it was I who did the inveigling, and hard work I had of it," gurgled Clarissa, with her provoking laugh, "Perhaps my perseverance even, would not have prevailed had it not been for—" she was about to say, "my fortune which is to be devoted to the Cause," when a glance from her husband's eyes startled her, and she did not finish the sentence.

This did not escape Theodore, whose rage could not exceed his wonder. Clarissa, whose willfulness was proverbial, whose insubordination under authority was known to every one, to quail beneath a glance from that man's eyes!

"I hope he will beat you!" he muttered.

"And I," said Clarissa, "shall love him even though he beat me." She dropped her head upon her husband's shoulder and for a moment her face was transfigured into absolute loveliness.

He kissed her, then pushed her a little away from him, saying, "Go on, Clarissa, I wish to finish here and be gone."

"Very well; I wish to say," continued Clarissa,—"but some one had better assist Aunt Inez; she has fainted."

Theodore carried his mother out of the room, returning almost immediately.

"I wish to say," proceeded Clarissa, "that I am very much obliged to Mr. Hawkins for being willing to hamper his youth with such a foolish wife as I should have been, and to Lord Kil-

dare that I wished for a gentleman for my husband and long ago decided that he must be an American gentleman, and that I was more particular about the man being really a gentleman, really all that the name implies, you know, than I was about who his father and grandfather were. You, Theodore, I want to promise that we will look after you and Aunt Inez—wait, wait—remember I speak from the advantageous standpoint now. You shall be assisted to a legitimate business; but the bulk of the Barlow fortune goes back where it belongs, to the people. That is, it is going to further the cause of Socialism. This is the real reason Dennis consented—”

Again that quiet look, and again silence and a change of subject. Evidently Mrs. Clarissa had her own lessons to learn, one of which was that the methods she had employed to tyrannize over her aunt and cousin were not likely to be a success with her husband.

“We shall only stay to see poor Betty Barlow laid to rest, then across seas on our wedding trip. Do you wish me to remain here until after the funeral, Theodore, or shall I go away with my husband?”

She was in hopes that he would turn her away, that she might be free to go with Dennis to the dear little attic and get supper over the spirit lamp; but Theodore said huskily, “Remain here,” and again she acquiesced, in obedience to the quiet glance from Blair’s eyes, which had the power, then, and ever afterwards, to subdue her wayward spirit.

"He doesn't beat me, as Cousin Theodore hoped he would," she told Britomart later, "but he dominates me, masters me, through the power of my love and admiration for him. I dare not say cutting things to him as I have always been in the habit of saying—had to, in fact, in self defense—to Aunt Inez and Theodore. I would not forfeit my husband's admiration for all the world holds beside, and you know, he does not admire my vindictiveness. He says that interview with Theodore, on the night of our marriage, was unnecessarily cruel, and if he had known what a proceeding it was to have been, he should never have consented to my going there. I took good care he should not know there were guests in the house. I wanted them—the very ones who were there. I think it no more than fair, Britomart, that the last grand flourish should have been theatrical, and I the central figure—I, who love it so. I wanted you to be present on that account, to let you know that you were not the only girl to make a romantic marriage, although—Ah! woe is me!—if it were not for your marriage mine could never have been, because Dennis Blair wanted you instead of me."

"Clarissa!" cried Britomart, "how foolish, how wicked, to talk like that. If your husband were here you would not dare say such a thing!"

"I know that well enough," answered Clarissa, "I dare not nag at him, but it is the truth for—Dennis Blair told me so himself when I asked him to marry me."

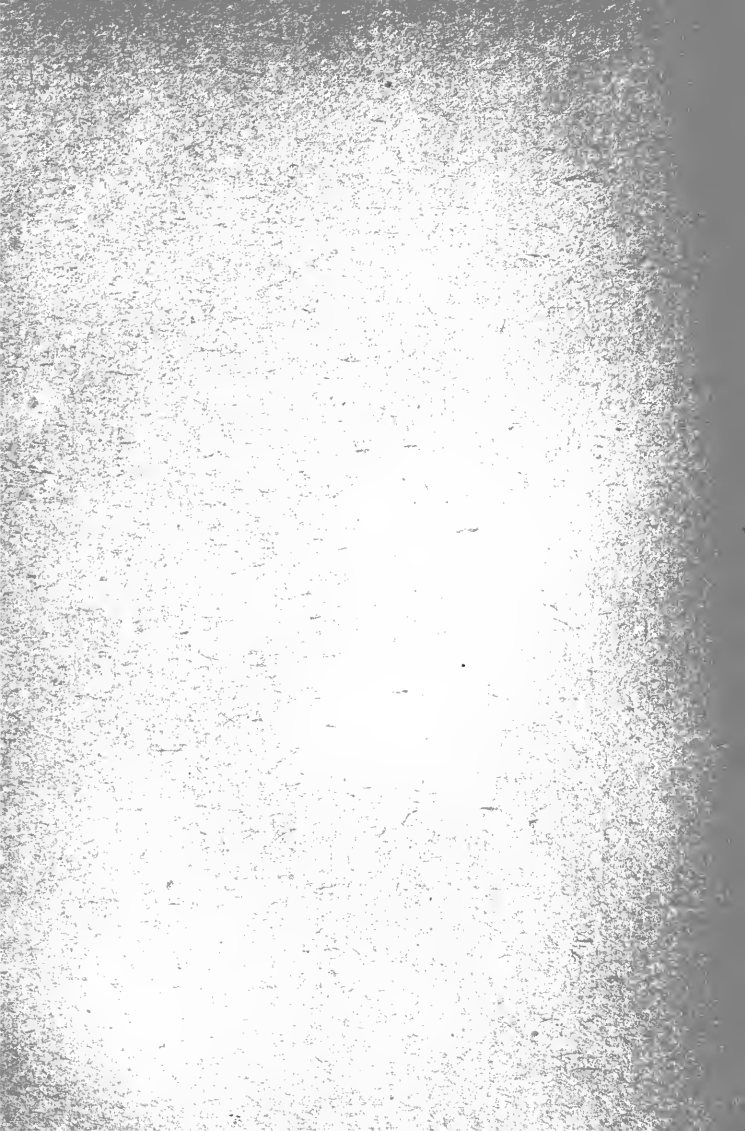
"Clarissa, you—"

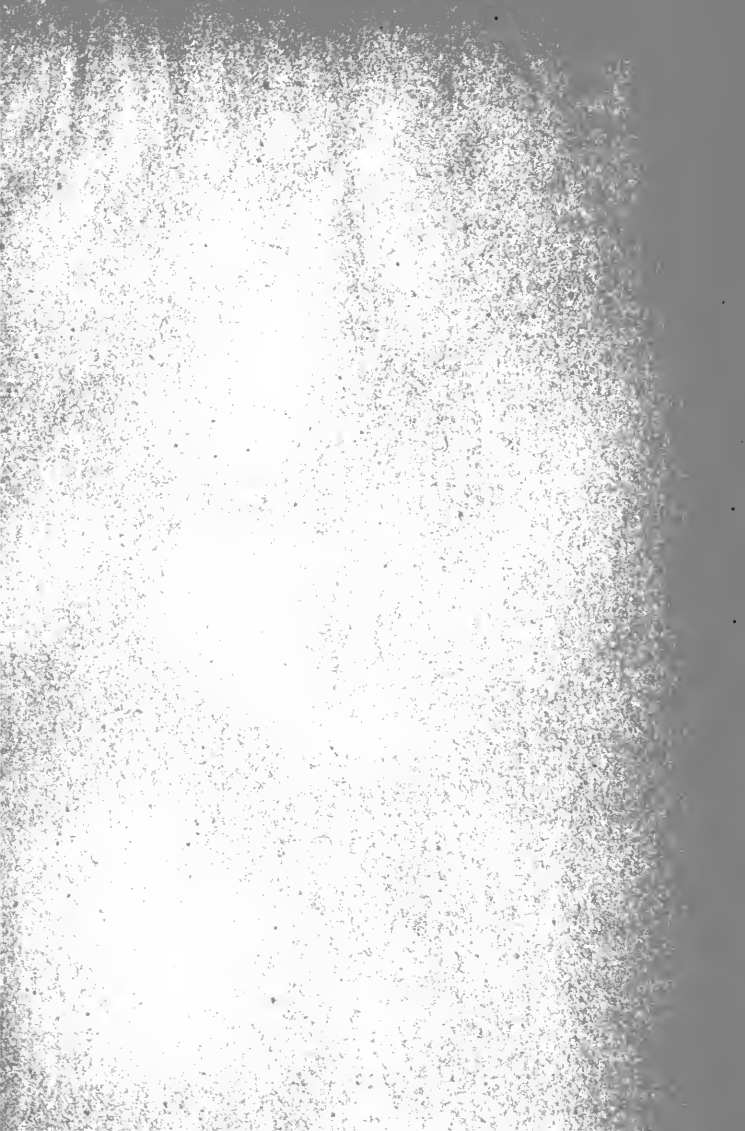
"Of course I did. Do you think the struggling editor of a labor paper who lived in an attic and made his own tea over a spirit lamp was going to ask the heiress of the Barlow millions to marry him? No, indeed, not Dennis Blair, especially when he was in love with another woman. Isn't it queer," she laughed, "I, who have always feared being married for my money above everything else, to marry at last, a man who tells me plainly that he is marrying me for my money. Don't look so horrified, Britomart, he told me that. It was my million he married for the sake of Socialism. It is to go just as fast as we can spend it, for that great cause, and Theodore's million on top of that. Dennis says it was accumulated through the murder of innocents and in order to wash the blood-stains from it, it must be cleansed by the grateful tears of the people. But don't flatter yourself, my lady. He shall love me if it is within the power of woman to bring it about. He shall! He shall! I will cling to him and coil myself about his heart until you are crowded out. I am doing it now—even this early."

She came to Britomart and leaned, panting, against her shoulder. Her black crown of hair scarcely came to Britomart's ear. Britomart was again reminded of a smooth, beautiful, but dangerous panther, tamed now by the hand of a master, yet quivering with the old lithe ferocity, loving her conqueror with the same wild uncontrol with which she hated her natural enemies.

Britomart put her arms around her and smoothed her much as she might have smoothed her feline counterpart from the vantage ground of safety which her own assured happiness made for her. Blair's confession of love for herself, made to Clarissa Barlow, was a revelation to her, for never, in word or action—and they had been much together—had the man revealed such an emotion, and never in the years to come, when they shall be associated with more or less familiarity in their chosen work, will Clarissa have cause for jealousy, because she is winning, as she boasted she should do, every corner of her husband's great heart to herself.

THE END.





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